



7 May 2021

Excellency,

I have the honour to circulate herewith, the summary of the sixth Morning Dialogue dedicated to the pressing humanitarian priority, “Risk of Famine”, held on Wednesday, 10 March 2021.

The 2021 Global Humanitarian Overview outlined that 235 million people may not survive without humanitarian assistance this year. As the international community we need to adopt a preventive approach to the growing challenge before food emergencies turn into full-blown famines. I hope the summary of the Morning Dialogue will contribute to draw wider attention to this urgent issue.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Volkan BOZKIR

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



Morning Dialogue Summary

Risk of Famine

Wednesday, 10 March 2021



The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkır convened his sixth Morning Dialogue dedicated to the most pressing humanitarian issue, “*Risk of Famine*” on Wednesday, 10 March 2021. The Dialogue was attended by H.E. Mark Lowcock, **Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator and by ten Ambassadors.**

The Morning Dialogues offer an opportunity to engage in focused informal discussions on issues of concern for Member States and the President of the General Assembly. The discussions do not represent a formal process and will not generate any official report. They are held under Chatham House rules, with a primary objective of promoting genuine dialogue that seeks solutions, complements system-wide messages, and provides ideas for concrete action, without duplicating existing processes.

All participants agreed that famine is looming in some countries where a substantial proportion of the population systematically suffer from hunger. They argued that hunger was already on the rise before COVID-19, mostly as a result of conflict, and in some cases due to climate change, and now further exacerbated by the secondary effects of the pandemic. They discussed how the UN system, its Member States and partners, can better take action to prevent the onset of multiple famines, respond to immediate needs and provide humanitarian relief to the most at-risk people, regions or countries.

Main messages delivered during the Dialogue:

- Famine is a very extreme occurrence – it is different from chronic hunger and poverty. Famine can be qualified when at least one in five households has or is most likely to have an extreme deprivation of food, resulting in the loss of life due to starvation.
- The risk of famine is on the rise. Main goal should be to make risk of famine rare. More countries seem to be slipping into situations where they are becoming more vulnerable to the risk of famine. Currently, there are acute situations in Yemen, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, and North East Nigeria.
- Conflict is the main underlying driver of famine, coupled with “belligerent manipulation” (i.e. hunger as a war tactic).

- Famine is a political event, not a humanitarian or food crisis. There has never been more food in the world.
- Famine is preventable. Price for the failure to do so is high, as responsibility to humanity is at stake.
- Causal and underlying factors of famine are broad and interlinked. Protracted conflicts are the primary cause of food insecurity and famine because of the ensuing forced displacement, disruption of livelihood and access to food, and in some instances to increased food prices. Belligerent behavior of conflicting parties, including targeting food production and markets, movement restrictions, and otherwise hindering humanitarian access are increasing risks of famine among conflict affected populations. Especially concerning are instances of using hunger as a weapon of war.
- Famine and conflict create a vicious cycle – on the one hand war and conflict cause more hunger and on the other hand, hunger can trigger further violence.
- Displaced populations are largely dependent on external food assistance for their survival and more vulnerable to the risk of famine. Women and children are particularly at-risk groups.
- Effects of climate change and natural disasters, such as droughts and floods are also among the factors affecting famine in regions where population are mostly dependent on agriculture and livestock activities.
- The outbreak of COVID-19 has further exacerbated the risk of famine and acute food insecurity in some of the most vulnerable countries. Before the pandemic there were mild cases of acute hunger, but now these cases are becoming imminent risks.
- The pandemic has also demonstrated that we are able to come together and address problems in solidarity, when the humanity is under risk. Based on this positive example, this year could be a year of change, as we come together through renewed will and work together to eliminate the risk of famine.
- Eradicating the risk of famine requires measures to address root causes of the problem, including targeted steps to mitigate imminent risks and investing in capacity building in developing countries to prevent famine in the long-term. The issue is urgent and immediate causes must be targeted in order to save lives.
- Paying an attention to diversified and resilient food systems, more sustainable exploration of food resources, and learning from local practice and knowledge is equally crucial. The 2021 Food Systems Summit will be important event to that end.
- Risk of famine also exists in the rural areas. Food scarcity is believed to be related to lack of sustainable income, rather than domestic food production

because some countries, which do not produce their own food, demonstrate no risk of famine.

- There is a need for better coordination and integrated response to the risk of famine within the United Nations system. If each institution (WFP, FAO, OCHA etc.) directs its expertise to the related aspects of the risk, better focus could be achieved.
- Being a representative organ of all Member States the General Assembly can use its unique position to facilitate formulation of international strategy to fight famine.
- The Security Council resolution 2416 (2018) has helped with prevention of famine, including by serving as an early warning system and mobilizing support for affected states.
- The Security Council must come forward with more determined and effective action to address crimes against humanity and use of starvation as a tool of war.
- Each country's needs and challenges are different – one solution does not fit all, but there are several essential elements for prevention of famine:

1) Early warning: important to prepare and respond to emerging crises. Several UN agencies already collect data and have early warning systems in place, but there is room for improvement. In particular, the Agencies, Funds, and Programs (AFPs), can have more forward-looking early warning systems. An Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (ICP) is one example of doing so. Security Council resolution 2416 (2018) serves as an important early warning tool, however it needs more “teeth”. It is also important to look at root causes of famine as part of the early warning process.

2) Access: sieges and blockages of people in areas, especially where food cannot be produced locally, as well as the designation of de facto authorities (e.g. Houthis in Yemen) as terrorist organizations, are key challenges for access that contribute to increased risk. Closure of areas in conflict zones (i.e. blockages/sieges) make it challenging to have a clear picture of the situation on the ground, including the potential risk of famine and appropriate response. Engagement with de facto authorities and non-state armed groups is important and these groups must comply with International Humanitarian Law.

3) Funding: Saving lives with food is the fastest and cheapest form of cash-based humanitarian assistance. Indeed, the earlier action is taken, the faster and cheaper it is to address the risk of famine. OCHA has used allocations from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund in countries most at risk from the growing hunger. However, donor states and partners must continue to ensure that necessary resources for humanitarian appeals are met. Financing system is based on voluntary contributions from a small group of countries – 70% of the

funding comes from 4 sources and 90% comes from 15 sources. This is not how we finance other global challenges, including the COVID-19 response. More donor diversification is needed in addressing the risk of famine sustainably – too much of the onus is on a small group of countries.

4) Development: the only way out of the risk of famine in the long-term is development. Resilient food systems are one important element of this, however not every country needs its own food system, as long as everyone has access to income to acquire food.
