

300 million people in 53 countries at risk of starving to death

Jean Shaoul**21 May 2025**

The number of people facing “high levels of acute food insecurity” in 2024 rose for the sixth consecutive year, reaching a horrific 295.3 million. The *2025 Global Report on Food Crises* (GRFC) notes that this is equivalent to nearly a quarter—22.6 percent—of the population of the 53 countries requiring external assistance that were its subject.

The almost 300 million people at risk of starvation is an increase of 13.7 million over 2023, thanks to escalating conflicts, cuts in humanitarian aid and climate and economic shocks.

That so many people face death by starvation, under conditions of unprecedented scientific and technological developments in food production and distribution, is a devastating indictment of the capitalist system of production for private profit. The report itself was barely mentioned in the mainstream media, indicating the degree to which famine and starvation have been normalised by the world’s ruling elites.

The 2025 annual report was prepared by 16 international agencies, including various United Nations organisations, the European Union, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and several regional intergovernmental bodies.

It said that escalating “conflicts” in Palestine and the Sudan had driven extraordinarily high levels of acute food insecurity, with Gaza becoming the most severe food crisis since the annual *Global Report on Food Crises* began.

The number of people facing the most severe lack of food, described as “catastrophic” and characterised by starvation, death, destitution and high rates of acute malnutrition, more than doubled last year. More than 95 percent of the people existing in such conditions are in Gaza or Sudan.

Some 36 countries or territories are deemed protracted food crises, having been included in all eight reports. Of these, 19 are protracted *major* food crises and account for up to 80 percent of the total population facing high levels of acute food insecurity across food-crisis countries/territories each year. Yet the plight of many of these countries never makes it to the international media.

In the anodyne words of the press briefing, “Intensifying conflict, increasing geopolitical tensions, global economic uncertainty and profound funding cuts are deepening acute food insecurity.”

Wars—typically described as conflicts—and insecurity were the primary drivers of food insecurity in 2023-24, affecting 134.5 million people in 20 countries or territories. Seven of these were in the Middle East and North Africa and six were in West Africa.

Conflict was the major driver in most of the 10 largest food crises: Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Myanmar, Nigeria, Gaza, Sudan and Yemen, with Gaza, Haiti and Sudan listed as worsening conflicts. Globally there were 12 percent more conflicts in 2023 than in 2022, and 40 percent more than in 2020. These have also contributed to the rapid increase in the number of displaced people over the last 10 years.

Since October 2023, around 80 percent of Gaza’s population have been internally displaced, many multiple times, due to Israel’s genocidal war on what was already little more than an open-air prison, suffering the impact of Israel’s 16 year-long blockade of the Hamas-controlled entity. The lack of adequate shelter and access to essential services, along with the reduced supply of food, fuel and other basic commodities, further increased the risk of famine, even before Israel imposed a total blockade last March.

Last week, a UN-backed assessment by the same group of international agencies reported that the entire population was experiencing critical levels of hunger. Half a million people—one in five of the population—were facing starvation. The reports said nearly 71,000 children under the age of five are expected to be acutely malnourished over the next 11 months to April 2026 and added, “Many households are resorting to extreme measures to find food, including begging, and collecting garbage to sell to buy something to eat”.

The report said, “Following the closure of all crossings into the Gaza Strip in early March, and the collapse of the

two-month ceasefire, food access has been severely restricted.” As a result, Gaza’s population of around 2.1 million Palestinians is at “critical risk” of famine and faces “extreme levels of food insecurity”, with around 244,000 people currently experiencing the most severe, or “catastrophic” levels of food insecurity.

This situation is a deliberate policy aimed at driving the Palestinians out of Gaza, carried out by the fascist government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been served an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Years of wars and conflict in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Syria have left their economies in tatters and eroded people’s resilience and ability to cope. This led to people fleeing their homes and seeking safety both within their own countries and beyond and affected not only the displaced people but host communities that were themselves too impoverished to help them.

The brutal war that broke out between rival factions of Sudan’s armed forces in April 2023 with the backing of regional powers created the world’s largest displacement crisis that year. Some 1.5 million people were internally displaced and a further 1.5 million displaced in neighbouring countries, including parts of Central African Republic, Chad and South Sudan, where high levels of food insecurity and malnutrition were already widespread.

The worsening civil war has led to famine being officially declared as more than 24 million of Sudan’s 52 million people face acute food insecurity, with atrocious impacts on women and children.

Around 6.6 million people are internally displaced in Syria and a further 5.5 million displaced in neighbouring countries where many face high levels of food insecurity amid worsening socio-economic crises and cuts in humanitarian aid.

As the world experienced its hottest year in 2023, leading to extreme heat, drought, wildfires, intense rainfall and flooding, 72 million people in 18 countries—up from 56.8 million in 12 countries in 2022—faced high levels of food insecurity for these reasons.

Twelve of these countries were in Africa, with the Horn of Africa experiencing below-average rainfall for three consecutive years, leading to the worst drought in 40 years that affected rangeland, water resources and crop and livestock production. In Central and Southern Africa, dry conditions had a disastrous impact on crop production, while cyclone Freddy in March 2023 caused mass destruction. A year later, an El Nino-driven drought devastated crop production, prompting Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe to declare national disasters.

In Asia, cyclone Mocha in May 2023 caused widespread

destruction, affecting more than 3 million people in Myanmar alone.

The cost-of-living crisis combined with a totally inadequate response by governments was responsible for 75 million people facing high levels of acute food insecurity as global economic growth slowed in 2023 following hikes in central bank rates. Of the 53 countries included in the study, 48 are net food importers. Many, poor and bereft of foreign exchange reserves, were unable to import sufficient food and other essential items, leading to exorbitant prices in domestic markets that made it impossible for many people to feed their families.

The report provides little in the way of a concrete analysis that sets out the political and economic processes—the activities of the banks, giant food corporations and traders and the role of governments and central banks—in creating this catastrophe.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in his introduction to the report, “This is more than a failure of systems—it is a failure of humanity”. No, this is a failure of capitalism. But Guterres called on the same capitalist governments that had caused the crisis to resolve it, saying, “This crisis demands an urgent response. Using the data in this report to transform food systems and address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition will be vital. So will finance. Funding is not keeping pace with need.”

His appeal will fall on deaf ears. It is impossible to end the wars, economic crises and global warming that have caused this catastrophe through moral appeals to capitalist governments. There must be a turn to the working class and the methods and politics of class struggle to fight for the international reorganisation of society on a socialist basis.



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