645 million go hungry as global military spending hits a record $2.9 trillion

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Nearly one in three people on earth cannot afford a healthy diet. That is the central finding of the 2026 edition of the UN's State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI), released July 21, which puts the figure at 2.69 billion people, or 32.7 percent of the global population.

The annual report is produced jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Health Organization (WHO). It finds that 645 million people, 7.8 percent of humanity, faced chronic hunger in 2025. Measured by the Food Insecurity Experience Scale, 2.1 billion people, more than one in four human beings, lack regular access to safe, nutritious, and sufficient food.

The report takes as its subject the cost of a healthy diet, which rose globally to 4.28 purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars per person per day in 2025, up from 2.94 in 2017, in large part driven by inflation.

The human consequences are etched into the bodies of children. Some 150 million children under five are stunted, suffering irreversible physical and cognitive impairment from persistent lack of protein, essential fatty acids, iron, zinc, and vitamin A. Millions more suffer from wasting, a state of acute starvation carrying high immediate mortality risks. Anemia among women aged 15 to 49 is worsening across nearly every region.

The report's regional breakdown reveals the structured inequality of the world market. For the first time, Africa has the largest number of hungry people of any region, 309 million against 292 million in Asia. The continent's hunger rate stood at 20.0 percent in 2025, and 66.6 percent of its population could not afford a healthy diet, crushed by currency devaluations and external debt service that siphon foreign exchange away from food systems toward Western creditors.

The UN agencies present the global numbers as an improvement, noting that the prevalence of undernourishment has declined from 8.6 percent in 2022 and 8.1 percent in 2024. This framing is cynical. The report's own analysis concedes that India alone drives the headline trend in affordability; exclude it, and the decline recorded across lower-middle-income countries reverses into an increase. A marginal statistical decline from catastrophic levels, in a period of unprecedented wealth accumulation at the top of society, is a further indictment of the system that produced it.

The question is why, in the third decade of the 21st century, amid productive capacities that could feed the world's population many times over, 645 million people remain chronically hungry and 2.69 billion cannot afford a nutritious diet.

Five weeks before the report appeared, a single stock listing made one man the wealthiest in recorded history. On June 12, SpaceX went public at a valuation near $1.8 trillion, and Elon Musk's net worth crossed $1 trillion that afternoon, peaking six days later at about $1.23 trillion before falling under $1 trillion again.

Hundreds of billions of dollars in private wealth were conjured into existence and then evaporated, on the basis of nothing more than the fluctuating market valuation of one company's shares. Over the same weeks, 2.69 billion people could not afford the food required to keep them healthy. The asset prices that briefly made Musk a trillionaire are driven by the same financial mechanisms that have pushed the cost of food, housing, and basic necessities beyond the reach of billions.

What makes the SOFI figures an indictment of the capitalist system is a fact the UN agencies acknowledge in passing but refuse to develop: there is no objective scarcity of food. Global agricultural production is more than sufficient to feed the world's population. The report's own subject is the cost of a healthy diet, not the capacity to produce one. Hunger in the 21st century is a problem of the social relations within which production is organized, above all the capitalist profit system, which allocates the necessities of life by ability to pay.

Marxism has long understood that capitalism does not

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simply develop the productive forces in a linear, progressive fashion. From a certain point in its historical development, the capitalist system becomes a fetter on the productive forces it has called into being. What we are witnessing today is not merely stagnation but the active destruction of productive forces by a system that can no longer accommodate them.

The most concentrated expression of this destructive logic is war. Global military spending reached a record $2.887 trillion in 2025, the 11th consecutive year of growth, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. The United States spent $954 billion, a third of the world total, and the members of NATO together spent $1.581 trillion. These are resources that, rationally deployed, could eliminate hunger, provide universal housing, and fund a global transition to sustainable agriculture many times over.

Instead they are poured into the means of destruction, from the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine to the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza and the preparations for war against China.

War destroys storage facilities, severs rural-urban transport links, displaces agricultural labor, and fuels hyperinflation in staple foods. SOFI 2026 folds the Middle East conflict into its own projections, estimating that 510 million to 520 million people will still face hunger in 2030, against 503 million in a pre-conflict scenario.

The destruction operates through more than bombs. The financial architecture of capitalism systematically starves the developing world. More than 50 nations are in or near severe debt distress. Sovereign borrowing costs force states to divert foreign exchange reserves from rural infrastructure, agricultural subsidies, and social safety nets toward external creditors, the banks and bondholders of Wall Street, London, and Frankfurt. Local currency devaluations, demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a condition of loans, spike domestic food prices overnight.

The same destructive logic governs energy and agriculture. Sustained price swings in crude oil and natural gas, driven by speculation and geopolitical manipulation, inflate the costs of nitrogen fertilizer, tractor fuel, and irrigation, pricing smallholder farmers out of production. The $800 billion spent annually on global farm subsidies overwhelmingly favors monoculture grain surpluses and agribusiness giants over the smallholder production of nutrient-rich fruits, vegetables, and legumes that could feed communities.

Meanwhile, the giant food corporations pour investment into automated processing plants that flood African and Asian markets with ultra-processed, nutritionally empty foods, producing the double burden of malnutrition: child stunting coexisting with surging adult obesity and noncommunicable disease. Adult obesity has risen from 12.1 percent in 2012 to 16.2 percent in 2024.

The same dynamic governs shelter. The UN's World Cities Report 2026 found that 3.4 billion people lack adequate housing, which capitalism has transformed from a basic necessity into a financial asset and a vehicle for rent extraction.

In the United States, the Trump administration has accelerated its assault on social programs, delivered massive tax cuts to the rich, and systematically enriched the financial oligarchy. But the entire political establishment stands indicted. The Democratic Party, for all its theatrical hand-wringing over poverty and inequality, has presided over the same fundamental policies for decades. It gutted welfare under Clinton, bailed out the banks under Obama, expanded the military budget, imposed austerity, and subordinated food and housing to the financial markets.

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and publications such as *Jacobin* perform the essential service of channeling whatever opposition emerges back into the Democratic Party, blocking the development of an independent political movement of the working class.

The UN agencies themselves, as Jean Shaoul wrote for the *World Socialist Web Site* in August 2024, "are part of the international order set up in the aftermath of World War II to enforce the peace; they act as pillars of support for the predatory aims of the US and other imperialist powers." Their reports document the catastrophe. Their policy prescriptions—debt-for-food swaps, concessional loans, the "repurposing" of subsidies—leave the property relations that generate it untouched.

The SOFI 2026 report confirms that the capitalist system, in its epoch of imperialist decay, is structurally incapable of securing the most elementary conditions of human existence for billions of people. The scientific and technological means to eliminate hunger exist. What does not exist, under capitalism, is the social mechanism to deploy them.

Only the international working class, which produces all of society's wealth, can create that mechanism. It must seize state power and reorganize economic life to meet human need. The fight against hunger is a political fight, inseparable from the struggle against imperialist war, against the dictatorship of finance capital, and for the socialist transformation of society.

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