

Foreword

Food insecurity is a brutal face of inequality. It divides nations and breaks societies. Stories of hunger are millennia old, yet the narrative is growing increasingly complex under globalization, climate change, population growth and geopolitics.

In the Arab region, food insecurity is currently being aggravated by the impacts of the war in Ukraine and the global cost-of-living crisis, which is heavily affecting food prices. In some countries, conflict has destroyed the ability of farmers to produce food and has devastated the livelihoods of people so that they can no longer afford nutritious food. In other countries, economic crises have decimated livelihoods and the ability of national Governments to provide for their populations.

Hundreds of millions of families across the Arab region live in a vicious cycle of poverty and hunger. Families are making difficult decisions as to how to portion their food and what they can cut from their daily diet. Those facing overlapping inequalities are the most vulnerable to hunger. The threat of hunger increases the desperation of the already desperate, forcing them to take unprecedented risks. They may take dangerous jobs or sell their only assets just to feed their families, exacerbating the vicious cycle of poverty and hunger.

Children living in poverty in the Arab region are at risk of being left behind. Without access to sufficient nutritious food, they are unlikely to develop on par with more fortunate, well-nourished children. They are more likely to experience poor health and are less able to afford decent medical care. Their education and psychosocial development will never catch up with that of their peers. They will have fewer opportunities available to them as they grow up and will face life-long exclusion and compound inequalities.

Food insecurity transcends hunger. It affects sovereignty and stability. Globally and throughout history, well-fed populations have been those to flourish; however, when

populations are kept in poverty and denied access to food, social unrest, instability and violence follow.

The Arab region holds enormous wealth. We have enough food in the region to feed our populations. So why do we still face food insecurity?

The answer lies in inequality. The Arab region has the greatest income inequality in the world. It is also characterized by massively unequal access to nutritious, healthy food and the ability to afford it. One third of the region's population are hungry and another third of the population are obese.

The solution requires solidarity and redistribution. One nation alone cannot solve the problem. Arab leaders need to come together to increase food availability, access, utilization and stability. We must support our agricultural sector and workers, adopt innovative digital technologies and promote regional trade. We must focus on redistribution through progressive policies and comprehensive social protection systems. We must also respond to the dangers of climate change by reducing our emissions, adapting to new practices and enhancing disaster risk management.

We must act now to deliver practical policy solutions to feed our communities. It is unacceptable that anybody should face hunger, let alone starvation, when there are enough resources for all. Food security is a necessity, not an option. We must leave no one behind in our quest to feed the region.

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