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The Architecture of Starvation

**Seven Years on From UNSC 2417:
Operationalising the Prohibition of Starvation
under International Law and Policy**

Produced by

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This report is authored and published as part of Global Rights Compliance's ('GRC') Starvation Mobile Justice Team. The Starvation Mobile Justice Team ('SMJT') is part of the UK, EU and US-sponsored Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group ('ACA') which was launched in response to the need of the Office of the Prosecutor General ('OPG') to increase capacity to investigate and prosecute atrocity crimes perpetrated since the invasion by Russian Forces of Ukraine. Other partners include the EU Mission ('EUAM'), Pravo Justice and the International Law and Development Organisation ('IDLO'), while GRC's Starvation workstream is funded in part by the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The Starvation Mobile Justice Team is one of multiple Mobile Justice Teams set up by international human rights law firm Global Rights Compliance – led by world-leading British human rights barrister, Wayne Jordash KC – to provide critical support to the Ukrainian OPG by assisting Ukrainian investigators and prosecutors on the ground as the conflict continues. The teams bring together leading domestic and international experts in the field of international criminal law, mass atrocity crimes investigations and case-building, as well as providing support to victims and witnesses.

The Starvation Mobile Justice Team is led by Catriona Murdoch and funded by the Kingdom of the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors (Global Rights Compliance) and may not be or coincide with the official position of The Netherlands.

Global Rights Compliance is an international legal foundation established in 2013 with a mission to enable people and communities to achieve justice through the innovative application of international law. GRC is specialised in on-the-ground international humanitarian law ('IHL'), international criminal law ('ICL') and human rights issues in conflict-affected and high-risk areas around the world, working to identify, prevent, address and mitigate adverse IHL and human rights impacts. Since 2017, GRC has become the leading legal organization on prohibiting, preventing and seeking accountability for mass starvation and associated violations. We possess unrivalled expertise and granular knowledge of the crime of starvation, derived from a dedicated portfolio of analysis, accountability and investigative work. GRC has conducted multiple starvation investigations with partners and pursued advocacy and accountability documentation accurately and sensitively with often unseen datasets and political nuance, with extensive experience in partnering with OSINT providers to pursue innovative investigative avenues. Our principal geographic focus has been Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Ethiopia, Ukraine, and more recently Palestine. For more information on GRC's starvation workstream, visit: <https://starvationaccountability.org>

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TABLE OF CONTENT

1. Executive Summary	4
2. Demystifying Starvation: The Importance Of Proper Labelling	7
3. Case Study: Critical Civilian Infrastructure And Starvation In Ukraine	11
Siege, Starvation And Capture Of Mariupol City	11
Chernihiv Bread Queue Attack.....	12
Destruction Of The Kakhovka Dam.....	13
The Illegal Seizure And Extraction Of Ukrainian Grain	15
Attacks Against Grain And Grain-Related Infrastructure In Odesa Oblast.....	15
4. Gaza, Syria And Beyond: Exploring Similar Tactics Across Different Contexts.....	17
5. Starvation Under International Law	21
Starvation Under The International Humanitarian Law Framework	22
Starvation Under The International Criminal Law Framework	24
Starvation Under The International Human Rights Law Framework.....	24
6. UNSC Resolutions – Key Implications And Practical Application.....	25
7. The Ongoing Path To Accountability	27
8. Conclusions And Calls To Action.....	29



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Starvation remains one of the most devastating yet under-acknowledged crimes in today's armed conflicts. Contrary to the misconception that starvation and resulting humanitarian crises are an inevitable part of conflicts, it is often a deliberate and unlawful strategy used by warring parties. This policy paper is released to mark the seventh anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2417 (S/RES/2417 (2018))¹, a landmark resolution adopted unanimously that condemns the deliberate use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. It aims to reflect on:

- the remaining need for accurate labelling amidst the existing misconceptions;
- the commonality of tactics across a number of current and recent conflicts;
- the challenges this agenda has encountered to date, including systemic failures of the international community to take preventative or even reactive action, alongside the efficacy of new UNSC resolutions introduced to strengthen the protection of civilians in conflict;
- the legal prohibition;
- the urgent need for the international community to strengthen its response to conflict-induced hunger, advance the understanding around the parameters of the use of starvation, and hold perpetrators to account; and
- impactful recommendations to promote prevention and deterrence and enhance the protection of civilians.

In 2018, with the adoption of UNSC 2417, the Council recalled that ongoing armed conflicts and related violence have devastating humanitarian consequences on the civilian population, highlighting the intrinsic link between conflict and hunger. The catalyst for UNSC 2417 was the alarming resurgence of famines, after a sustained period of declining global hunger and no famines. The Resolution strongly condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare

in conflict situations and called for all warring parties to spare civilian objects, including objects necessary for food production and distribution, including farms, markets, water systems, and to refrain from attacking objects that are necessary to the survival of the civilian population ('OIS'), such as crops, livestock, agricultural assets, drinking water installations and supplies. Yet despite UNSC 2417, global hunger has increased year on year, reaching now in 2025 unprecedented levels. Over 343 million people are facing severe food insecurity, and more than 1.9 million are suffering from catastrophic hunger, in places such as Gaza, Sudan, South Sudan, Haiti, and Mali, while in pockets of Sudan, famine has already been confirmed.² Conflict today is the primary driver of hunger. Despite this, the legal and policy frameworks in place to investigate and act to prevent or ensure accountability for the use of deliberate starvation remain underutilised, siloed, weakly enforced, and often stagnate in empty statements at high-level meetings.

Legal Clarification and the Myth of Starvation

One of the most persistent myths is that starvation is merely the deprivation of food and that it equates to famine or acute food insecurity. However, the crime of starvation places the emphasis on the action of the intentional deprivation of OIS, which includes not just food, but all objects essential for civilian survival, rather than on the consequences. In fact, for the crime of starvation to attach, it is not necessary for deaths to occur as a result. It is the deliberate deprivation of, or denial of access to OIS, whether by siege, destruction of critical civilian infrastructure, or obstruction of aid that underpin the crime. Yet, language such as "food insecurity" or "malnutrition" dominates humanitarian discourse, often masking the criminality behind deliberate acts of deprivation.

A Weakened UN Security Council Response

Several UNSC Resolutions have been adopted in recent years, attempting to bolster or restate the protections already afforded to civilians in conflict settings. UNSC Resolutions 2417 (2018)³, 2573 (2021),⁴ and 2730 (2024)⁵ were all positive steps toward recognising the vicious cycle between conflict and hunger, condemning the use of civilian starvation, urging the international community to enhance the protection of critical civilian infrastructure and humanitarian personnel and aid. However, implementation and operationalisation remains fragmented, with no dedicated mechanism to trigger early warnings, investigate incidents, or ensure accountability. Political inertia, lack of clear focal points, and limited transparency hinder the Council's ability to respond decisively to starvation-related crimes.

Case Studies and Comparative Analysis

To debunk some of the myths still surrounding the crime of starvation and raise awareness of its current and recent use, this paper reflects on some of the commonalities of how starvation has manifested across different contexts, highlighting Ukraine in particular, as a situation that would not necessarily be associated with food insecurity or starvation. It outlines several investigations Global Rights Compliance's (GRC) Starvation Mobile Justice Team⁶ have conducted, focusing on attacks on critical infrastructure including dams, water supplies, siege warfare, attacks of food and aid distribution points, and attacks on Ukraine's grain and port-related infrastructure. Aiming to compare these tactics with those used across Syria and Gaza, amongst others, the paper seeks to dispel the myths and misunderstandings often associated with the concept of 'starvation'.

The Path Forward: From Recognition to Action

Despite normative advancements, enforcement and deterrence remain elusive. Since 2017, GRC's Starvation and Humanitarian Crisis Division has been working with a range of State and non-State partners, including governmental actors,

local civil society organisations and humanitarian actors to drive the conflict and hunger agenda on multiple plains. The Division developed a range of resources and toolkits, such as the Starvation Jurisprudence Digest,⁷ along with mobile tools⁸ and training resources,⁹ to elevate awareness and capacity.

International Humanitarian Law ('IHL') does not collapse in a single moment. It erodes gradually, chipped away by sustained impunity and crimes that fail to be investigated and prosecuted. We are witnessing this erosion today. We see it in the deliberate starvation of entire populations, in hospitals turned into battlegrounds, in the indiscriminate targeting of civilians and critical infrastructure, and the calculated dismantling of the protection afforded to humanitarian operations. Each time a state or warring party justifies such conduct, and each time the international community looks away, the moral and legal scaffolding of IHL weakens. To halt this erosion and reaffirm the international community's commitment to IHL, concrete and coordinated action is urgently needed.

Calls to Action

- 1. Support the establishment of a designated UNSC 2417 focal point¹⁰** (such as a Special Envoy or an Independent Expert Mechanism) to lead and coordinate reporting on conflict, starvation and the protection of humanitarian personnel and assets.
- 2. Establish early warning reporting mechanisms to trigger UNSC 2417** requiring the UN Secretary-General to report within 30 days of emerging crises, and ensure publication of briefings to enhance transparency.
- 3. Encourage states to ratify and implement the Rome Statute Starvation amendment¹¹** to criminalise starvation in non-international conflicts and align domestic legislation with international obligations.
- 4. Support capacity-building initiatives to increase understanding** of the legal framework governing starvation as a method of warfare to support investigations and prosecutions of starvation related conduct.

5. Leverage accountability frameworks, including through the use of sanctions, by supporting or requesting investigations; and by referring appropriate situations to the International Criminal Court ('ICC') and domestic prosecuting authorities and war crimes units in countries which have active universal jurisdiction avenues.

The deliberate use of starvation as a method of warfare must no longer be ignored or mischaracterised. We have the tools and

understanding to act. What is missing is the political commitment and operational coordination. We know that impunity is an accelerant to conflict and instability. Starvation crimes clearly reflect this, with an increase in these tactics and a catastrophic situation of global food insecurity prevailing.

Starvation is not an inevitable consequence of conflict: it is a deliberate tactic used by belligerents. The international community faces a choice: to treat starvation as a crime that demands justice, or to allow impunity to persist.

2. DEMYSTIFYING STARVATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPER LABELLING



One of the most common myths surrounding the concept of starvation is that it can only occur in situations where there is not enough food. Terms such as “hunger,” “malnutrition,” “famine,” or “food-insecurity,” are often used interchangeably with the crime of starvation and can mean different things to different actors, triggering different responses from humanitarian actors, policy makers, and legal practitioners, oftentimes lacking to recognise the criminality causing such situations.

GRC’s Starvation and Humanitarian Crisis Division has been working at the forefront of this agenda for over seven years, aiming to bring more clarity to the conflict and hunger agenda, disentangling an often-complex causal nexus and ambiguities surrounding the exact parameters of the war crime of starvation. Through its programmes working with grassroots partners and thematic experts, the Division has attempted to move the needle forward and debunk some of the myths surrounding starvation and its deliberate use in conflict.

The global hunger and malnutrition crisis signals a turning point, and the system in place to prevent famine is failing. With the shutdown of the USAID Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS-NET), a system which tracked and predicted food insecurity for over 40 years, early warnings to prevent harm are lacking. 343 million people are currently facing severe food insecurity,¹² with more than 1.9 million people suffering from catastrophic levels of hunger,¹³ and 1.05 million people experiencing famine.¹⁴ The most severely affected regions include Gaza and Sudan, with dire conditions also present in parts of South Sudan, Haiti, and Mali.¹⁵ Conflict is the primary

driver of hunger in all these areas¹⁶, with several conflict incidents closely related to food security continuing to take place. As an illustrative example, in 2024, Sudan experienced at least 140 violent incidents at food markets, the majority of which involved air-launched explosive weapons or shelling by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) or Rapid Support Forces (RSF).¹⁷

Some current situations embody a common understanding of starvation. Sudan is a nation where 24.6 million people are experiencing acute food insecurity, and 638,000 are facing catastrophic hunger.¹⁸ Widespread starvation is unfolding across the country.¹⁹ On the other hand, Gaza, at the time of writing, has received no food or humanitarian aid since 2 March 2025, following a total unlawful siege imposed by Israel. No food. No water. No fuel. No medicine.²⁰ All UN-supported bakeries in Gaza have been required to shut their doors²¹, and storage facilities of the UN and other international agencies are empty, even Israeli military officials have privately concluded that Gaza is on the brink of widespread starvation, and immediate steps are needed now.²² Starvation has already taken the lives of more than 95 Palestinian children,²³ and, as of May 2025, more than 9,000 children have been admitted for treatment of acute malnutrition since the beginning of 2025 alone, while hundreds more are in desperate need of treatment but unable to access it.²⁴ Furthermore, in Gaza, since 7 October 2023, more than 52,650 Palestinians have reportedly been killed, and more than 118,900 have been injured.²⁵ Against this backdrop, the UN Secretary General has defined Gaza “a killing field”, where civilians “are in an endless death loop”.²⁶

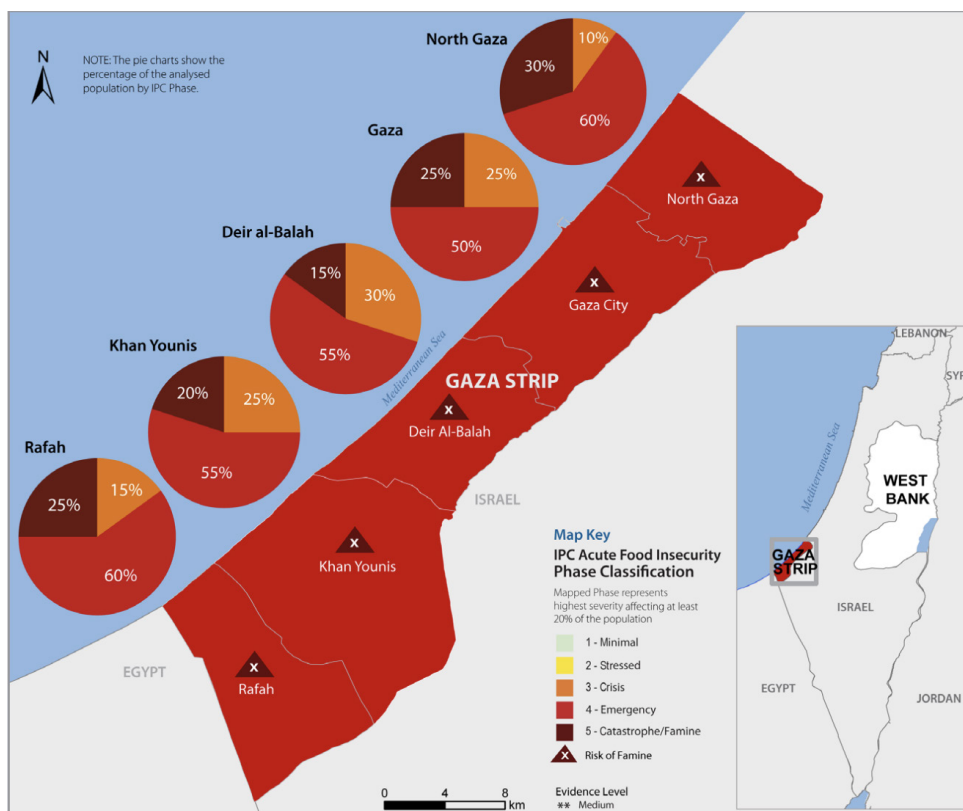


Figure 1: IPC Projected Acute Food Insecurity | 11 May – 30 September 2025²⁷

In contrast, Ukraine, a country that prior to its full-scale invasion was described as the “breadbasket of Europe” due to its thriving agricultural sector and its leading role as a grain exporter, is not a country the public currently associates with starvation, or akin to countries like Sudan or Gaza. Yet, as this paper explores and as the contours of what deliberate starvation entails are drawn, the parallels in the tactics across these conflicts are unmistakable. We invite the reader to challenge the commonly held perceptions of this method of warfare, including the perceived inevitability of its impact, and instead demand its prevention, and where appropriate, punitive action against those responsible.

Whilst adequately describing some of the most salient aspects of the physical occurrence of starvation, the language around food insecurity and famine fails to reflect the intentional conduct that often underpins it, in breach of IHL, international criminal law (‘ICL’), and international human rights law (‘IHRL’). Ensuring that the deliberate deprivation of OIS is labelled consistently ensures that the deliberate conduct is properly recognised as a crime and that perpetrators are held accountable.

What is the crime of starvation?

In brief, starvation is the deliberate deprivation of objects indispensable to the survival of civilians. Contrary to the common understanding, starvation and the concept of OIS are not limited to food items. The legal framework is very clear in this regard: OIS should be interpreted more broadly so as to include other essential commodities, including but not limited to water, medical supplies, electricity, and gas, amongst others.²⁸

The arrest warrants for the war crime of starvation sought by the ICC against Netanyahu and Gallant reveal in surprising detail how the ICC views this crime, reinforcing that beyond food and water, attacks on fuel and electricity may firmly be viewed as part of the crime of starvation, where other requisite elements are met.

Importantly, the international crime of starvation places the emphasis on the perpetrator and their actions, rather than on their consequences. To ‘starve’ means to cause suffering (physical or psychological) or death by deprivation of an indispensable item. As such, for the prohibition



Figure 2: A Farm In A Ukrainian Village Destroyed By Artillery Shelling (Vidimamax)

of starvation to be violated, the perpetrator must have intended to starve the population, but it is not necessary for people to actually perish as a result.

Starvation is, at its core, a man-made phenomenon. Among the main contributors to the global food crisis—climate change, economic instability, displacement - armed conflict stands out as the most significant driver of acute food insecurity. Conflicts disrupt food access and availability and tend to reverse economic and development gains, limiting communities' and countries' capacity to withstand and recover from climatic and economic shocks. By way of illustration, a total of 65 percent of the 343 million people facing acute hunger are in fragile or conflict-affected countries. Whilst starvation as a method of warfare is an ancient tactic, many recent conflicts contain the hallmarks of starvation, including the deliberate deprivation of OIS, widespread attacks on critical civilian infrastructure as well as on humanitarian and medical facilities and personnel, the obstruction of humanitarian aid, forced displacement, and siege tactics.

Clarifying the parameters of the prohibition of starvation and the language surrounding the framing of this type of conduct is essential. It is one of the international institutional changes that

GRC has been working towards. Too often, it is not until a famine declaration is made or is looming that a given situation captures the international community's focus, with high-level action requested or taken. There is a need for a paradigm shift in the reference grid for international action or reaction, away from the consequence and towards conduct-related triggers to further preventative action. This would ensure that the law can also play a preventative role in addressing conflict-induced hunger and can step in well before deaths by starvation and dehydration occur or before a country's critical infrastructure is decimated, hindering long-term recovery.

Ukraine: an outlier?

Starvation's visibility is often hindered by the resilience of communities. In addition, there is usually a delay between conduct and impact in relation to starvation, where food insecurity or the impact of depriving OIS may manifest weeks, months, or even years later. International law and international attention have typically been preoccupied with more traditional battlefield crimes that have immediate or short-term impacts, such as casualties or damage and destruction of properties. This was one of the most prominent

challenges faced by the Starvation and Humanitarian Crisis Division upon commencing an investigation into attacks on critical infrastructure and starvation in Ukraine with the SMJT.

How does one investigate starvation crimes in the absence of food insecurity or famine in Ukraine? When the baseline of food secure communities is different from “typical” humanitarian crises situations, why would we call that starvation?

Discussing the strategic merits of pursuing such a case with prosecutors and investigators in Ukraine was all the more challenging given their recent history of mass famine during the Holodomor. This is an archetypal example of the horrors of this crime; could the sieges across Ukraine, the kinetic attacks on agricultural infrastructure and pillage, in the absence of deaths from starvation, fit within this under-prosecuted criminal category?

Attacks on civilians, critical civilian infrastructure, and the consequent deprivation of OIS have plagued Ukraine from the outset of the invasion, with grave consequences both internally and on global food security. What is apparent following GRC’s investigations and analysis is that the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has indeed been characterised by a range of starvation-related tactics similar to countless other conflicts. In Ukraine, Russia has weaponised food in three distinct phases:

- first, by laying siege to civilian inhabited areas and attacking or otherwise cutting off access to essential items;
- second, by conducting patterned attacks against civilian critical infrastructure (including electricity, shelter, energy, and water supplies); and
- third, by weaponising agriculture by preventing or restricting exports of Ukrainian grain, compounded by repeated and systematic attacks against grain facilities, pillaging of agricultural machinery and harvests, and the blockade of ports and grain shipments.

Some OIS are obvious, the destruction of a humanitarian convoy containing food, or the targeting of a food distribution point, for example; others where objects may have a dual-use or offer a proportionate military advantage, are more complex. Disentangling the chain of events that allows practitioners to find an intent to starve amidst multiple lawful and unlawful goals, and piecing together patterns of violations, requires specialised support and documentation. Where critical infrastructure is attacked, destroyed, removed, or rendered useless, the consequences for civilians may often seem far too removed. However, it is fundamental to consider what functions a facility was carrying out for civilians. The destruction of electricity infrastructure might have a direct knock-on effect on the functioning of life-saving machinery in a hospital, or on water pumping stations that ensure civilians’ access to potable water, or on telecommunications that enable humanitarian workers to deliver assistance to those in need.

Through a set of case studies below, the present paper aims to delineate how starvation and the weaponisation of food may manifest and be perpetrated through a range of tactics.

3. CASE STUDY: CRITICAL CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE AND STARVATION IN UKRAINE



GRC's Starvation Mobile Justice Team ('SMJT'), launched in January 2023 as a response to the urgent need to investigate starvation-related crimes in Ukraine, has documented in meticulous detail how Russia has weaponised food in Ukraine forming an integral part of the conflict dynamics. The investigations entailed comprehensive analyses of closed and open-source investigations, including visual content, photographs, videos, statements by public officials, and other digital data. Between 2023-2025, the SMJT conducted investigative activities focusing on three principal investigative pillars, namely:

- (i) the siege of Mariupol;
- (ii) the naval blockade of the Black Sea Ports and grain theft and attacks on grain and port-related infrastructure; and
- (iii) broader patterns of attacks on OIS of the civilian population across Ukraine.

This culminated in the following widely distributed reports and legal submissions on:

- (i) attacks against electricity infrastructure, attacks against potable water infrastructure, damage to distribution points, and damage to healthcare facilities during the siege and capture of Mariupol (24 February - 20 May 2022);
- (ii) the attack against a bread queue in Chernihiv Oblast, on 16 March 2022;
- (iii) the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam on the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast on 6 June 2023;
- (iv) the illegal seizure and extraction of grain in occupied territories; and
- (v) the attacks against grain and port-related infrastructure in Odesa Oblast between July and October 2023.

Siege, Starvation and Capture of Mariupol city

Between 2023- 2024, the SMJT led a ground-breaking investigation into the siege of Mariupol, exposing Russian forces' use of starvation-related tactics against besieged civilians.

Coinciding with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Russian forces ('RFAF') immediately began wresting control over Mariupol – a strategically vital city on the Sea of Azov with geopolitical significance for maritime trade. More precisely, over the course of an 85-day offensive for Mariupol (24 February to 20 May 2022), Russian and pro-Russian forces laid siege to Mariupol and simultaneously conducted large-scale attacks on the enclave and civilians trapped within, while also impeding access to humanitarian aid to those living under the control of Ukrainian forces and denying evacuations. In the aggregate, these patterns of attacks on Mariupol were deployed across three phases:

- I. First, by targeting critical civilian infrastructure, including water and energy infrastructure, impacting civilians' access to basic necessities, including food, electricity, heating, gas for cooking, potable water and access to key information, and destroying residential buildings, forcing civilians to seek safety in makeshift shelters;
- II. Second, Russian and pro-Russian forces conducted attacks on humanitarian evacuation routes and green corridors, while discriminately and arbitrarily denying the humanitarian access of food, aid and medical supplies to civilians in dire need of essential supplies; civilian evacuations were regularly frustrated in the context of

the siege of Mariupol, including through the establishment of filtration systems, to screen those attempting to flee the enclave, and identify those loyal to the Russian state apparatus; and

- III. Third, once essential supplies had been destroyed through kinetic attacks and the delivery of aid entry was obstructed from the outside, Russian and pro-Russian forces began targeting key locations set up as coping mechanisms in the absence of indispensable objects, such as *ad hoc* distribution points for food, bread, water, medical supplies, shelters set up in the city and hospitals.

Russian and pro-Russian forces failed to take all feasible precautions to mitigate incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, and damage to civilian objects. At the same time, they took little to no concrete steps to alleviate civilian suffering, with the compounded effects of creating an acutely dire impact on vulnerable residents trapped inside Mariupol, who had to subsist during extremely harsh winter months. During the siege Russian authorities clearly acknowledged in public statements the ongoing “humanitarian catastrophe” inside the city.

All these actions, considered in the aggregate, led the SMJT to conclude that there were reasonable grounds to believe that Russian and affiliated forces intentionally used starvation of civilians in Mariupol as a method of warfare, to both accelerate the surrender of Ukrainian armed forces and capture the city of Mariupol and its surroundings.

In June 2024, the SMJT released a ground-breaking report on Mariupol, *The Hope Left Us*, which goes into more detail on this topic. Information has also been shared with investigative authorities, both at the domestic level and internationally.

Chernihiv Bread Queue Attack

Russia’s tactics of siege and attacks on food, aid, or water distribution points have not been limited to Mariupol. Another example was investigated by GRC’s SMJT in Chernihiv City. As Russia unlawfully



Figure 3: “The Hope Left Us:” Russia’s Siege, Starvation, and Capture of Mariupol City, report released by the SMJT in June 2024

invaded and moved across Ukraine, trying to occupy and besiege towns and cities, Chernihiv, an ancient and historically significant city 150km north of Kyiv, was besieged between 24 February and 4 April 2022. As supplies dwindled in the city, and shops were looted, like in Mariupol, ad-hoc food distribution points were organised to ensure civilians could access food and water.

On 16 March 2022, Russian forces shelled a queue of civilians that had formed in the morning in the utility yard of a store to receive bread.²⁹ After careful analysis and conducting an open-source investigation (OSINV), the SMJT concluded that a 122mm GRAD rocket system, an area weapon, was likely used in the attack. The use of these weapons systems in densely populated areas such as Chernihiv may be indiscriminate in nature, as civilian loss and damage to civilian objects would have been anticipated and excessive in comparison to the military advantage pursued with the attack.

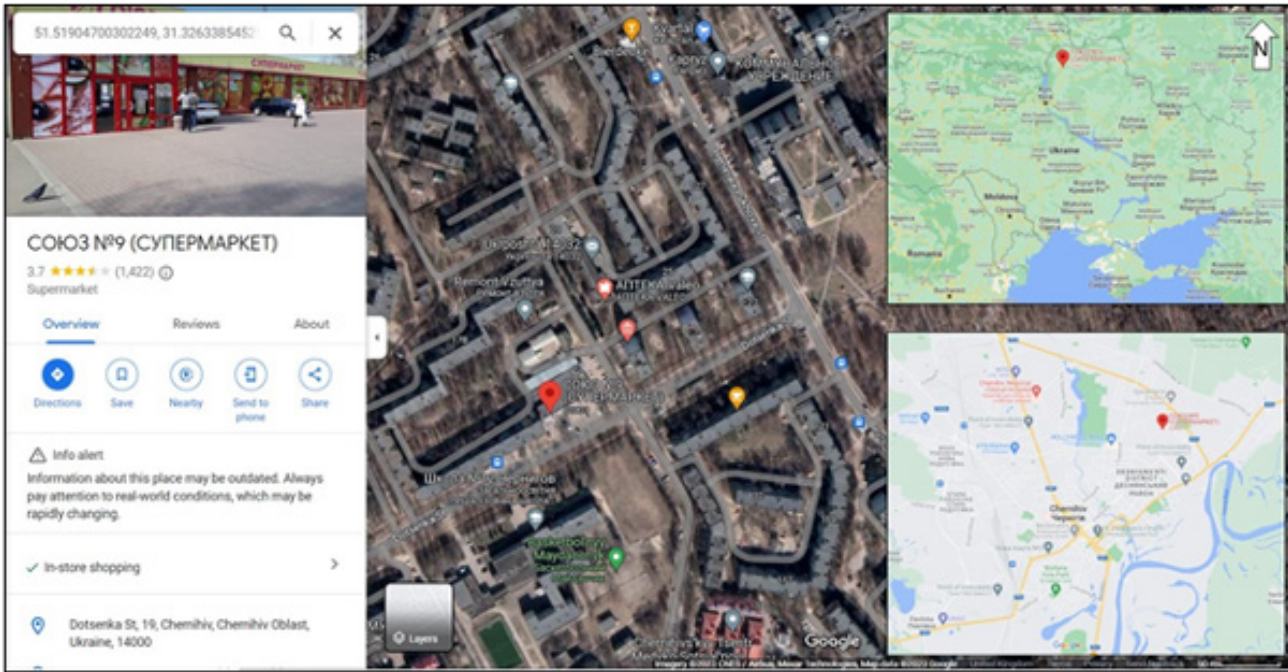


Figure 4: Location of SOI-O3 Branch 19 Store Where Bread Queues Formed (Google Maps)
(51.5190744111385, 31.326356563280346)

The attack resulted in the death of at least 14 civilians, with reports indicating that an additional seven people lost their lives due to their injuries later after being transported to a hospital, and injuring dozens who were queuing for bread or in the surrounding area.

The store was both officially announced and locally known as a food distribution point. Before, during, and after the day of the incident, several water, energy, heating infrastructure, civilian dwellings, markets, hospitals, and food/water distribution points in Chernihiv experienced similar attacks. For example, one day after the attack against the bread queue, on 17 March, a water queue was shelled, as well as the Chernihiv City Hospital No. 2, where victims of the bread queue attacks were receiving treatment for their injuries.

These incidents, amongst others, revealed a pattern of repeated and/or coordinated attacks on civilians' access to essential necessities, effectively depriving civilians of objects indispensable to their survival.

Destruction of the Kakhovka Dam

On 6 June 2023, the Kakhovka Dam was breached. To investigate the incident, GRC's SMJT conducted a rapid OSINV, engaging with

weapons, ordnance and munitions experts, and conducted a site visit with the ICC and the OPG in the immediate aftermath to several areas across the region engulfed by the damage to the Kakhovka Dam.

On 6 June, at 2:54hrs EEST, seismic stations in Ukraine detected an explosion. The SMJT determined that there is a high probability that the damage was caused by pre-emplaced explosives positioned at critical points within the Kakhovka Dam's structure and detonated by the RFAF, who were in control of the Dam at the time of the attack. GRC found a complete absence of any information that the dam was struck by an aerial or ground attack, including no intercepts nor witness testimony to that effect. Moreover, according to engineering experts tasked by the SMJT, an external detonation would not have been sufficient to breach the dam in the manner and extent that was recorded. Approximately 400m of the central section of Kakhovka Dam was damaged. The attack on the Kakhovka Dam also compromised its reservoir, which held 18 cubic kilometres of water essential for multiple functions.

The destruction of Kakhovka Dam severely jeopardized the civilian population's ability to access OIS, including freshwater supplies,

irrigation, farming land, fishing grounds, and shelter, raising several issues related to the protection of civilians, including the increased risk of dislodged landmines, as observed by the SMJT during its site visit in June 2023. The loss of the Kakhovka reservoir that resulted from the attack on the dam severely impacted the irrigation of farmland, which relied on the reservoir as a source of water. This, in turn, impacted farmers' ability to conduct livelihood activities indispensable to their survival. Flooding and the loss of irrigation are expected to have long-term effects on agriculture in the region, continuing to impact the community's access to livelihoods, eroding their resilience and capacity to recover in the future. Flooding from the breach also severely affected communities downstream on both the left and right banks of the Dnipro River, amongst others. The flooding damaged 37,000 homes, displaced many residents and catastrophically affected over 1.2 million people in Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, and Kherson Oblasts, leaving them without a stable water supply. Agricultural land downstream was also flooded and negatively impacted, with landmines dislodged and flooding agricultural fields, making in many cases the resumption of livelihood activities impracticable.

Furthermore, in the immediate aftermath of the breach and despite this emergency situation, Russian forces continued shelling along the right bank of the Dnipro River, jeopardising and impeding aid organisations and humanitarian volunteers' ability to assist people in flooded and otherwise affected areas. On the left bank of the river, reporting indicated that the humanitarian response was delayed, and the usual curfews and checkpoints were kept in place, denying entry or exit to civilians or aid volunteers alike. In certain instances, access to aid and assistance was further contingent upon civilians having a Russian passport.

The SMJT found there was no evidence of prior warnings to civilians to evacuate, as well as no proof of any other action taken to minimise civilian harm. The ease with which the RFAF destroyed critical civilian infrastructure and other OIS – compounded by their lack of efforts in discharging their precautionary obligation to minimise civilian casualties and damage, including lack of advance (effective) warnings – when viewed together with the repetition of such attacks throughout the entirety of the conflict, and in a variety of locations, revealed a manifest pattern of attacking OIS.

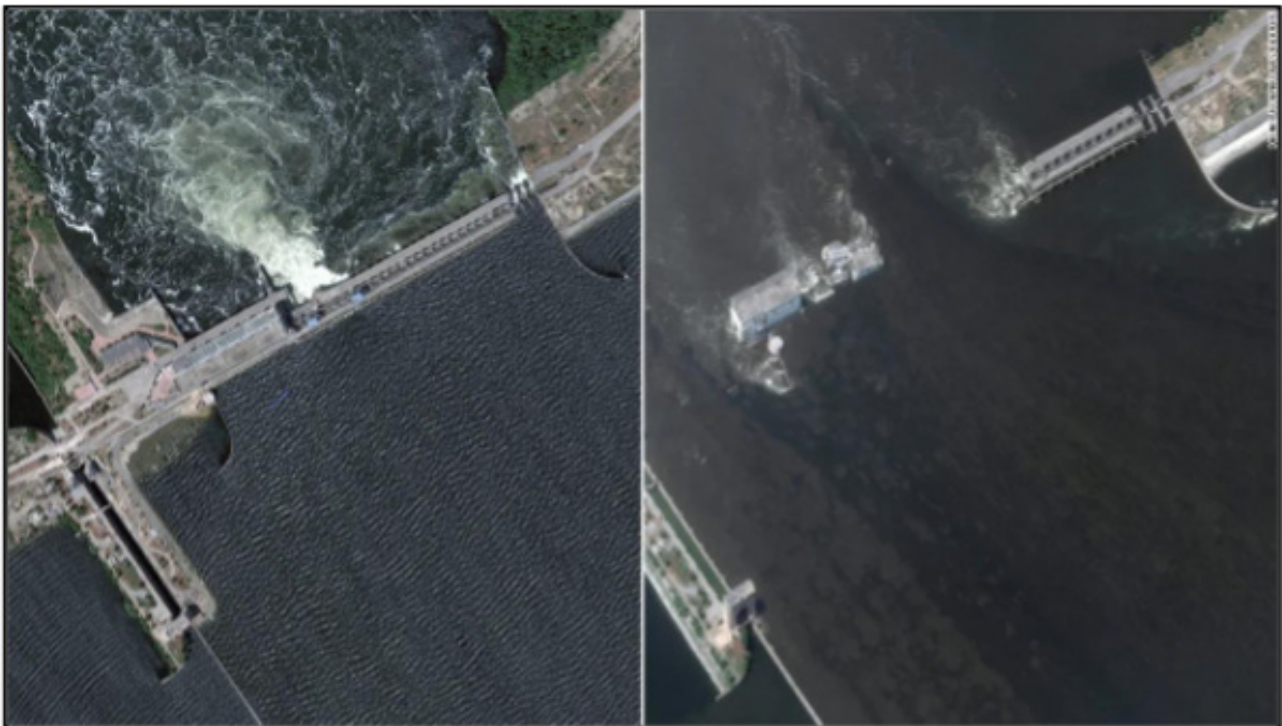


Figure 5: Image showing Kakhovka Dam on 5 Jun (left) before damage, and on 7 Jun (right) post damage.

The Illegal Seizure and Extraction of Ukrainian Grain

Since the outset of the full-scale invasion, Russia has perpetrated large-scale theft and seizure of Ukrainian grain and attacked Ukraine's avenues for export. Within the first weeks of the invasion, Russian and pro-Russian forces started taking over and appropriating Ukrainian farms and agricultural companies as they captured and occupied territory. In addition, shortly before the full-scale invasion, Crane Marine Contractors (CMC), a subsidiary of the Russian state-owned defence contractor United Shipbuilding Corp.,³⁰ purchased three grain carrier ships, measuring 170-180 metres.³¹ All three ships are 'handy bulkers' (medium bulk carriers),³² which is the maximum length and depth allowed by Sevastopol's Avlita grain terminal. CMC's purchase of grain carrier ships specifically sized to navigate Sevastopol's Avlita grain terminal appeared as a preparatory step in Russia's broader effort to consolidate a large-scale grain extraction network.

The SMJT conducted in-depth OSINV, maritime and ship tracking, analytical work and consultation with relevant stakeholders on the theft and extraction of grain with a particular focus on the occupied territories in Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia.

The investigation, carried out between March and June 2023, found that Russian forces and Russia-affiliated non-military actors followed a highly organized and pre-planned system of appropriation across occupied territories:

1. Purchasing grain carrier ships prior to the start of the invasion;
2. Seizing and taking control of grain facilities from Ukrainian farmers and corporations;
3. Taking control and renovating transport networks around grain elevators, including railways;
4. Consolidating control over grain elevators, railways, and ports by installing Russian-affiliated civilian administration officials and incorporating them as Russian legal entities (State or Municipal Unitary Enterprises);
5. Transporting stolen grain to occupied areas of Ukraine and further exporting them to Russia, to mix it with Russian grain and place it on the global market.

Information analysed indicated evidence of pre-planning to pillage grain on a scale unprecedented in modern history.

In November 2023, the SMJT released a widely published report, *Agriculture Weaponised*, which analyses the pillage, seizure and extraction of Ukrainian grain.

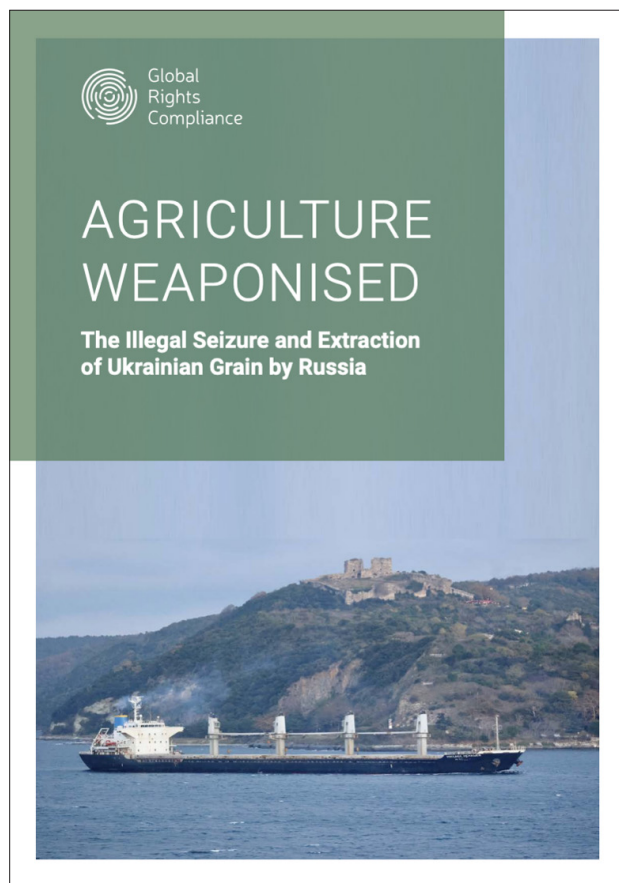


Figure 6: "Agriculture Weaponised - the Illegal Seizure and Extraction of Ukrainian Grain by Russia", report released by the SMJT in November 2023

Attacks Against Grain and Grain-related Infrastructure in Odesa Oblast

In parallel to the pillage and seizure of agricultural land, equipment and crops, between July and October 2023, Russia launched a campaign of high-scale drone and missile attacks on the ports of Chornomorsk, Reni, and Izmail, the inland agricultural company 'Ivushka,' and the Orlivka Border Crossing. These attacks followed within hours of Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which entered into force in July

2022 to ensure Ukraine could continue exporting grain and provide global supply to food-insecure countries. The nine attacks analysed during the SMJT's OSINV resulted in the destruction or severe damage of grain elevators, a junction of conveyer belts indispensable to direct grain distribution, as well as grain storage sheds and warehouses, with total damage and destruction of more than 101,000 tonnes of grain and grain-related infrastructure.

The attack against the single port of Chornomorsk destroyed 60,000 tonnes of grain, while the two attacks on the port of Reni rendered 9,440 square meters of grain-storage facilities useless. The port of Reni, together with Izmail, is one of the biggest ports along the Danube River in Ukraine. In April 2022, the Russian Ministry of Defence expressed clear knowledge that Ukraine's Danube ports had begun serving as an alternative route to export grain and other crops *in lieu* of occupied or blockaded Black Sea Ports,³³ without which, according to a Russian-sponsored propagandist, "Ukraine simply does not exist."³⁴ These are just some of the numerous high-level Russian statements made during and in the aftermath of the attacks investigated, which display clear knowledge of the importance of these ports to Ukraine.

These patterns of attacks on Ukraine's agriculture and exports had and continue to have a devastating impact on civilians and their way of life, and on global food security.³⁵ Against this backdrop, the SMJT conducted a six-month OSINV into these attacks, utilizing a range of all-source intelligence capabilities for damage assessment and perpetrator analysis, including source, image, and video analysis, satellite imagery analysis, geo- and chrono-location, WOME analysis, and marine tracking. Most of these attacks were carried out in the absence of military objectives in the immediate vicinity and, in several cases, appear to have been launched with expensive, high-precision weapons, leading to the strong inference that Russian Forces were able to hit their intended targets, that is grain or grain-related infrastructure, vital to Ukraine's economy and civilian livelihoods.

In May 2025, the SMJT released a unique advocacy report, entitled '*Harvesting Conflict*', which further analyses and expands on the unlawful attacks against grain and related infrastructure in the Odesa Oblast and complements GRC's innovative [Story Map](#) under the same title released in December 2024.



Figure 7: "Harvesting Conflict: Unlawful Attacks against grain and related infrastructure in the Odesa Oblast". The SMJT will release this report in May 2025.

Overall, widespread kinetic attacks against Ukraine's grain and port-related infrastructure are interconnected with Russia's systematic seizure and extraction of Ukrainian grain. The SMJT finds this to be part of an overarching strategy, with multiple overlapping purposes, including economic warfare and destabilisation; geopolitical leverage; global food supply and price manipulation; undermining international alliances; leveraging sanctions relief; and for the strategic control of food supplies. This highlights the complex interplay between conduct that may be viewed simply as attacks against civilian infrastructure, to a more intentional conduct and means and methods of warfare, to weaponise agriculture and food, as a way to collectively punish Ukraine.



4. GAZA, SYRIA AND BEYOND: EXPLORING SIMILAR TACTICS ACROSS DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Any comparative analysis between conflict situations must be approached with caution, due to stark differences and context-specific nuances that define each.

However, examining facets of these conflicts through the lens of starvation – focussing on the prohibited conduct rather than on its impact or consequences – offers illuminating insights. This approach helps uncover striking similarities in conduct that would otherwise be overlooked and, in some instances, common perpetrators.³⁶ These commonalities can be particularly useful in challenging the myths and misconceptions that surround the concept of ‘starvation’. They further serve as potential illustrations of the violations and crimes outlined below in section 5 in the legal overview.

Gaza, Palestine

Already prior to the most recent escalation of hostilities, 80 percent of Gaza’s inhabitants were

relying on humanitarian aid to survive due to the air, land, and sea blockade imposed by Israel since 2007. On 9 October 2023, the Israeli Defence Minister announced the strengthening of the blockade on Gaza into a complete siege. This situation has been compounded by a campaign of sustained aerial and ground bombardment, evidencing blatant disregard for civilian life, described by the United Nations (‘UN’) as inflicting an “unprecedented and unparalleled” civilian death toll.³⁷ Over 51,000 Palestinian civilians have reportedly been killed since 7 October 2023,³⁸ with Médecins Sans Frontières stating that Gaza is turning into a “mass grave for Palestinians”.³⁹ 1.9 million people, representing almost the entirety of Gaza’s population, have been repeatedly, forcibly displaced⁴⁰, and over 436,000 percent of housing units have been damaged or destroyed, leaving no shelter.⁴¹ This is in addition to the large-scale destruction of critical infrastructure across Gaza, including water, food, health, and energy, amongst others, and affecting every sector of the economy.⁴² The conflict has additionally been characterised



Figure 8: Al-Shati refugee camp, Gaza in March 2024

by the use of dehumanising language towards Palestinians, describing a fight “against human animals,”⁴³ amongst several similar sentiments, and an overtly stated disregard for the rules of proportionality and necessity from senior Israeli military and government officials.⁴⁴ As an illustrative example, in October 2023, the Israeli Defence Minister, Yoav Galant said that “Gaza will never return to be what it was”, and “I have released all restraints, we use everything”.⁴⁵

Even before the collapse of the ceasefire in March 2025, Israel resumed using humanitarian aid as a negotiation tool, violating the most basic humanitarian obligation to provide aid unconditionally.⁴⁶ This exacerbated the pre-existing humanitarian crisis, with the UN reporting that no humanitarian aid has entered Gaza since 2 March 2025.⁴⁷

The situation in Gaza led to the first ever arrest warrant issued by the ICC in 2024 for the war crime of starvation against Gallant and Netanyahu, with the ICC outlining the systematic denial of humanitarian aid, attacks against humanitarian personnel, convoys and facilities, and the almost complete deprivation of and attacks on OIS, including food, water, medicine, electricity, and fuel. The use of these tactics has resulted in one

of the world’s fastest and most visible declines in food security.⁴⁸ The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued additional provisional measures “in view of the worsening conditions of life faced by Palestinians in Gaza, in particular the spread of famine and starvation” requesting that Israel take all necessary measure to ensure the unhindered provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Gaza, including by opening and increasing land crossing into the Strip to do so.⁴⁹ These provisional measures have been consistently ignored.

Syria

The use of sieges and starvation as a method of warfare was a defining feature of the Syrian conflict. Parties to the conflict and the Syrian government in particular, systematically began laying sieges in a coordinated manner against opposition-held or politically resistant areas, cutting off access to essential goods and humanitarian access to aid and assistance to vulnerable civilians trapped in besieged areas. These sieges were not merely imposed on enemy combatants or fighters, rather, they were designed to coerce mixed and at times entirely civilian populations to ‘kneel or starve’ -



Figure 9: Street graffiti in Syria reading, “Kneel or starve”, signed by “Assad’s soldiers. Image published by 60 Minutes on X (formerly Twitter) on 29 November 2014

starve or surrender – by depriving entire civilian populations of food, water, medical supplies and other essentials to survive.⁵⁰

Areas such as Eastern Ghouta, Madaya, and parts of Aleppo were subjected to prolonged sieges, with Eastern Ghouta being one of the longest running sieges upheld for over five years, during which civilians endured extreme hardship, indiscriminately bombed, denied evacuations and humanitarian aid, resulting in severe and acute malnutrition, preventable deaths, particularly among those most vulnerable including children, the elderly and those living with disabilities.

The complete siege of Yarmouk, which lasted for over a year, resulted in the deaths of 179 civilians, including 12 infants and 6 children, all recorded to have died from starvation. It serves as one of the starkest examples of this method of warfare. Beginning in 2013, government forces and affiliated militias imposed a siege on the area, completely cutting its residents from the outside in July 2013, trapping tens of thousands of civilians without access to food and other essentials.⁵¹ By 2014, UN agencies reported acute food and medicine shortages. According to UNRWA, the situation reached “catastrophic” levels, with documented cases of civilians dying from starvation and reports of residents resorting to eating grass, animal feed, and stray animals to survive.⁵² Basic medical care was unavailable, and humanitarian convoys were systematically denied access or severely delayed, despite repeated international appeals.

An additional facet of conflict dynamics in Syria was the use of double tap strikes, including in the context of the siege of Yarmouk, whereby attacks on first responders were followed by a second deadly attack timed wherein emergency response teams arriving to the scene of a first strike were targeted in a second attack at the same site. Further, and similarly to other conflict contexts mentioned in the present paper, parties to the conflict in Syria conducted attacks and airstrikes on humanitarian aid distribution points, where civilians would gather to receive desperately needed supplies, aid and medicine, amongst others.

Despite clear normative frameworks protecting civilians in armed conflict and specific protections prohibiting the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, siege and starvation tactics became a

systemic strategy of the Syrian regime and other armed actors rather than isolated incidents.⁵³

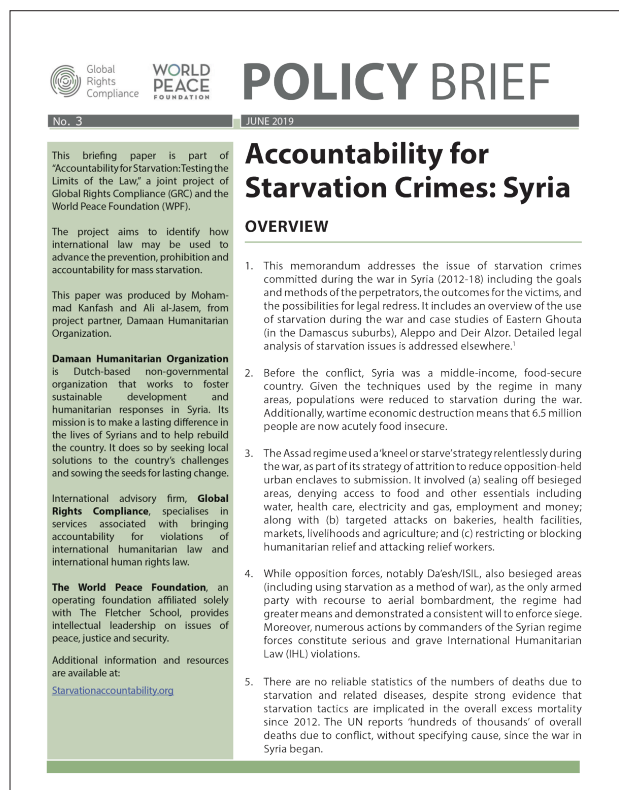


Figure 10: “Accountability for Starvation Crimes: Syria”. Briefing paper published in June 2019 as part of a joint project between GRC and WFP

Commonalities

Russia’s strategic manoeuvres – including the well-known strategies of *maskirovka* (“misinformation”) and *blokirovaniye* (“blocking”)⁵⁴ – involved pinpointing vulnerabilities in defensive lines, whereby pro-Russian forces were able to strategically infiltrate and isolate areas, were used in both Syria and Ukrainian sieges. These manoeuvres were accompanied by corresponding unlawful attacks, including deliberate attacks against OIS such as energy and water infrastructure.

Just as they had in eastern Ghouta - Syria,⁵⁵ Russian and pro-Russian forces laying siege to Mariupol City demonstrated an acute ability to identify unit boundaries and then exploited them to fracture the Ukrainian defence by attacking OIS,⁵⁶ including by deliberately cutting off access to telecommunications⁵⁷ and humanitarian aid, both of which disproportionately and overwhelmingly affected besieged civilians.

As they did in eastern Ghouta,⁵⁸ Russian and pro-Russian forces split Mariupol City into three distinct areas, enabling pro-Russian forces to create isolated pockets of resistance while fracturing Mariupol City into the three and disrupting communication — and therefore coordination — between defending Ukrainian forces, destroying in tandem the communication between civilians. These strategies left vulnerable civilians deprived of vital information about humanitarian aid, shelters, or evacuation routes.

Another comparison can be drawn in the use of sieges between Mariupol and Gaza., where common tactics included attacks against OIS and critical infrastructure with an emphasis on deliberate attacks against energy, water, food and aid, food, water distribution points, telecommunications and healthcare facilities, and the discriminatory and arbitrary denial of humanitarian aid to civilians living under the control of Ukrainian forces.⁵⁹ Many of these tactics are apparent when assessing the eighteen months of hostilities in Gaza since the strengthening of the siege around the enclave, with systematic attacks against OIS, critical infrastructure, telecommunications, humanitarian facilities, and attacks on civilians desperately seeking to access humanitarian aid having been widely recorded and reported on.

As noted above, though amidst comparative tactics, there remain fundamental differences between these sieges. Most notably Mariupol was a porous siege with civilians sporadically permitted, or able to, flee at certain points, albeit often through filtration systems.⁶⁰ In Gaza, conversely, people have been sealed inside the decimated 356 km squared strip, prevented from fleeing into neighbouring countries since 7 October 2023.⁶¹ At least 1.7 million persons, almost the entire population of Gaza, have been forcibly displaced, often multiple times within the enclave, due to military operations.⁶²

When viewed holistically, it can be understood that Ukraine, despite its absence of food insecurity, has in fact conflict dynamics common to both Syria and Palestine. Depriving food and humanitarian aid is and has, across all three conflicts, gone hand in hand with tactics of attacks on critical infrastructure, propaganda, and the fracturing of enclaves.

Gaza and Syria are just two of the most visible examples where starvation is, or has been, used as a method of warfare, similar patterns can be observed elsewhere. In Sudan, for instance, the regular obstruction of humanitarian aid and the use of siege tactics have been widely documented, particularly in El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur. As fighting has intensified between rival armed groups, tens of thousands of civilians have been trapped in the city with dwindling access to food, water, and medical care. In Tigray, Ethiopia, siege and starvation tactics were widespread, including the use of scorched earth tactics and systematic attacks on OIS, such as farms, agricultural resources and grain storages, water supplies, markets and shelters, amongst others, during the height of the conflict.⁶³ These cases underscore a troubling and overlooked trend in modern warfare, where starvation is not a by-product of conflict but a deliberate tool of coercion and control.

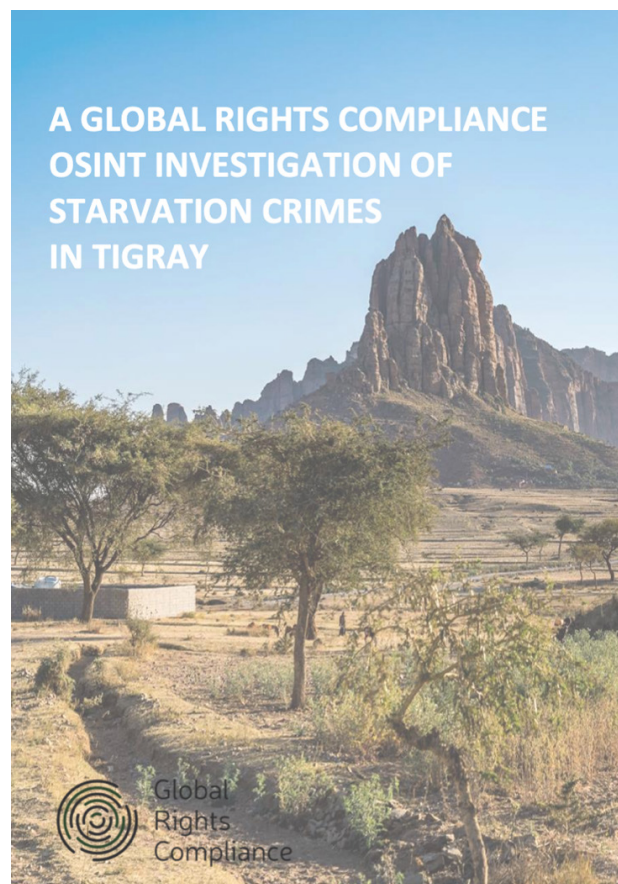


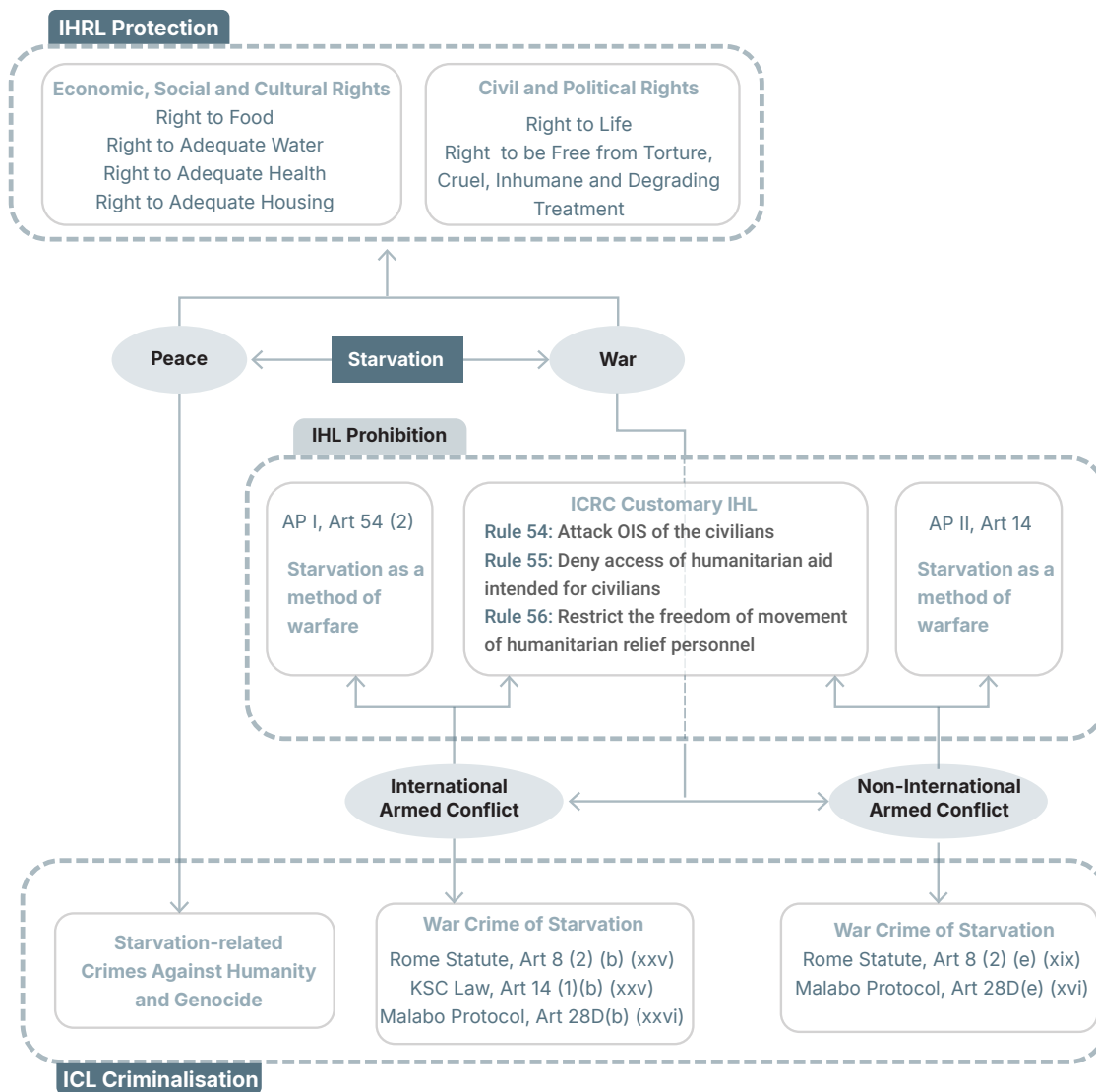
Figure 11: "A Global Rights Compliance OSINT Investigation of Starvation Crimes in Tigray", report released by GRC in October 2022

5. STARVATION UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW

Intentionally depriving civilians of OIS is increasingly used as a method of warfare, as evidenced across a range of recent conflicts across the globe. However, it was only after the end of the Second World War that starvation was recognised as a prohibited method of warfare under both IHL and ICL. This recognition was further solidified with the Rome Statute of the ICC, which in 2002 featured

for the first time at the international level the war crime of starvation.

The figure below underlines the connection between the prohibition of starvation under IHL, its criminalisation under ICL, and the related rules under IHRL. Noting that incidents may simultaneously comprise an IHL violation or breach, a war crime or a human rights abuse.



Starvation under the IHL Framework

IHL, also known as the law of war, is the body of law that seeks to limit the effects of armed conflict for humanitarian purposes.⁶⁴ It applies during international ('IAC') and non-international ('NIAC') armed conflicts, as well as situations of belligerent occupation.⁶⁵ Depending on the gravity of the offence, violations of IHL can be classified as "simple violations", "serious violations", or "grave breaches." The last two categories of violations may qualify as war crimes.⁶⁶

The first rule underpinning starvation is the prohibition of the deprivation of OIS. According to **Article 54(2) of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions**, "it is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population [...] for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party, whatever the motive, whether in order to starve out civilians, to cause them to move away, or for any other motive." **Article 14 of Additional Protocol II** includes a similar but less detailed provision for NIACs.⁶⁷

Under IHL, the protection of humanitarian relief is an issue related to, but separate from, the prohibition of starvation and the deprivation of OIS. According to **Article 70 of Additional Protocol I**, "[t]he Parties to the conflict and each High Contracting Party shall allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of all relief consignments, equipment and personnel provided in accordance with this Section, even if such assistance is destined for the civilian population of the adverse Party."⁶⁸

Objects Indispensable to the Survival of Civilians

OIS is an open-ended concept. There has not been a standalone international case on the war crime of starvation, so it is yet to be seen where the limit lies, or if there is a limit at all. IHL offers illustrative examples which include foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works. Apart from the objects that are always necessary for one's survival, such as food and water, OIS can also be circumstance-specific, accounting for the climate and territorial variances, the characteristics of the victims, as well as the public health situation.



A man standing in front of a destroyed building. Long way to Home. Ukraine, Irpin city. Spring 2022

© Dmytro Tolokonov

Perpetually indispensable objects:

- Food stuff
- Agricultural areas for the production of foodstuff (e.g. farmland, fishing ground)
- Crops, livestock
- Drinking water installations and supplies
- Irrigation works
- Medical supplies
- Means of shelter
- Fuel and electricity
- ...

Situationally indispensable objects:

- Perpetually indispensable objects:
- Food stuff
- Heating and clothing in cold weather
- Insulin for diabetic patients
- Formula milk for infants
- Oxygen cylinders for ICU
- PPE for COVID-19 epicentre
- Cash for the urban poor
- ...

Modes of Deprivation

The deprivation of OIS can take many forms beside the attack, destruction, removal, or rendering useless of the OIS, such as burning crops, polluting wells, or scorching fields. Any conduct restricting

civilians' use of an OIS may qualify as deprivation. This includes wilfully impeding relief supplies as well as acts such as attacking, destroying, damaging or removing such objects or rendering relief supplies useless.⁶⁹

Acts of Deprivation:

- Maintain a total blockade or siege
- Stall the safe passage of relief supplies
- Ambush a humanitarian aid convoy
- Deploy landmines at food distribution points
- Deliberately bombard the roadside buildings such that the debris cut off the road
- Acquiesce to the killing of healthcare workers
- Obstruct women's access to market with sexual violence
- ...

As a result of a missile attack on Odesa on May 8, 2023, the rented warehouse of the Odesa regional organization of the Red Cross Society of Ukraine with an area of 1,000 square meters was completely destroyed.

© Red Cross Society of Ukraine



Sieges

While sieges and siege warfare are referred to within international legal frameworks, there is no formal definition of siege under IHL or ICL. Unlike blockades, there are no specific criteria or thresholds that must be met for specific rules to become applicable.⁷⁰ The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has defined sieges as:

“the military encirclement of an area with the imposition of restrictions on the entry and exit of essential goods with the aim of forcing its surrender.”⁷¹

While sieges and siege warfare are not prohibited *per se* under international law, these methods of warfare will inevitably have an adverse impact on any civilians present in the besieged areas. As such, they must be conducted in compliance with the relevant IHL rules that protect civilians, including but not limited to the principle of distinction, proportionality and precautions, the

prohibition of civilian starvation, and protections afforded to the delivery of humanitarian relief and their operations. Where a siege is directed at, and encircles, both enemy combatants/fighters and civilians alike, depriving civilians of OIS, may amount to the war crime of starvation, when coupled with the requisite intent.

A Panel of Experts in International Law ('Expert Panel') convened by the ICC Prosecutor in support of his investigation into the *Situation in the State of Palestine* recently found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the crime of starvation of civilians in the Gaza Strip has been committed through a variety of acts of deprivation, including: i) a siege and the closure of border crossings; ii) arbitrary restrictions on the entry and distribution of essential supplies; iii) cutting off of supplies of electricity and water; and iv) severe restrictions of food, medicine and fuel supplies.⁷²

Blockades

Unlike sieges, under IHL, the term 'blockade' has a settled legal definition and clear rules

surrounding how they are established, declared, and enforced. In short, a blockade is a naval and/or aerial operation by which a belligerent completely prevents movement by sea from/to a port or a coast belonging to or occupied by an enemy belligerent. Colloquially, however, many humanitarian agencies and media outlets have called the obstruction of access as a 'blockade' – even if there is no movement by sea is involved.

Blockades may not be enforced in a way that causes disproportionate civilian harm. Similarly, the prohibition of starvation as a method of warfare also limits the conduct of blockades, which must not be used to deny civilians access to essential goods such as food, water, and medical supplies. The San Remo Manual suggests that the prohibition attaches to blockades implemented with the "sole purpose of starving the civilian population or denying it other objects essential for its survival," but provides also that "[i]f the civilian population of the blockaded territory is inadequately provided with food and other objects essential for its survival, the blockading party must provide for free passage of such foodstuffs and other essential supplies" subject to technical arrangements and conditions on humanitarian supervision.⁷³ The Newport Manual states that a blockade is unlawful if "solely or primarily intended to starve the civilian population, or solely or primarily intended to deprive the civilian population of objects essential to its survival."⁷⁴

Starvation under the ICL Framework

Building on the IHL prohibition, the Rome Statute of the ICC criminalises the intentional use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, in both international and non-international armed conflicts, by depriving them of OIS, including wilfully impeding relief supplies (see Articles 8(2)(b)(xxv)⁷⁵ and 8(2)(e)(xix) of the Statute).⁷⁶

The crime of starvation is established when the following elements are present:⁷⁷

- The conduct took place in the context of and was associated with an armed conflict and that the perpetrator was aware of factual circumstances that established the existence of an armed conflict (contextual or 'chapeau' element);
- The perpetrator deprived civilians of objects indispensable to their survival, including by wilfully impeding relief supplies (actus reus /

material element); and

- The perpetrator intended to starve civilians as a method of warfare (*mens rea*).

Despite the significant global interest and momentum around the crime of starvation, with accountability mechanisms, UNSC resolutions, governments, the ICC and other WCUs, increasingly considering this violation in their investigations, reporting and resolutions, there has yet to be a standalone prosecution of this crime at the international level.⁷⁸

Starvation under the IHRL Framework

IHRL is a body of law that applies at all times, aiming to protect individuals from the power of the state.⁷⁹ Its primary sources are international and regional human rights treaties, supplemented by customary rules. The right to food is a core human right and is recognised under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,⁸⁰ the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,⁸¹ their optional/additional protocols,⁸² and forms a part of the right to an adequate standard of living under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁸³ In addition to the right to food, interconnected human rights include, the right to be free from hunger, the right to water, health, the broader right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to life – all of which can be engaged and undermined by starvation-related conduct.⁸⁴ The analysis of starvation-related conduct through the prism of the IHRL framework may support the interpretation of starvation as a crime.

The right to adequate food addresses less severe food deprivation and is realised when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical access and economic access at all times to a sufficient quality and quantity of food to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals. While this right is subject to progressive realisation, States are required to begin taking steps immediately to fulfil their obligations.

The right to adequate food and water and the right to be free from hunger impose three different obligations on state parties, namely, obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil.⁸⁵ Violations of these tripartite obligations can occur through either the "direct action"⁸⁶ or the "omission or failure of States to take necessary measures stemming from legal obligations."⁸⁷

6. UNSC RESOLUTIONS – KEY IMPLICATIONS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION



In recent years, the UNSC has increasingly emphasized the protection of civilians (PoC) within its broader peace and security agenda. UNSC Resolutions 2417 (2018), 2573 (2021), and 2730 (2024), each reflect a growing international commitment to strengthening the legal and operational foundations of the protection of civilians, critical civilian infrastructure and the protection of humanitarian space, especially in complex humanitarian emergencies. These resolutions were intended to represent more than symbolic gestures and offered hope of a shift in the way we think about the international law framework and its purpose. These normative frameworks remind us of the tangible (albeit at times inaccessible) mechanisms for improving protection outcomes on the ground.

UNSC Resolution 2417 marked a watershed moment by explicitly recognizing the link between armed conflict, hunger and food insecurity. By condemning the use of starvation as a method of warfare and the deliberate denial of humanitarian access, the resolution recalled and emphasised norms of international law already firmly accepted, further cementing growing consensus and understanding around the parameters of civilian protection in armed conflict.

It also institutionalized early warning mechanisms by mandating that the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) brief the Council when there is a risk of conflict-induced famine, enabling the UNSC to take immediate action.⁸⁸ The resolution further required the imposition of sanctions, where appropriate, for humanitarian access violations, and called on States to conduct independent, impartial, prompt and effective investigations into the use of starvation as a method of warfare.

UNSC Resolution 2573 (2021) further expanded this protective framework by focusing on the targeting of civilian infrastructure, particularly

OIS such as critical infrastructure, including those necessary for the delivery of humanitarian aid, water systems and health facilities, amongst others. The resolution reflects a growing concern about the systematic attacks on critical civilian infrastructure in protracted conflicts, which often result in long-term harm to civilian populations. It further reiterated the importance of capacity-building initiatives in IHL to further the protection of civilians and indispensable objects.

Last year, in 2024, on the 6th anniversary of UNSC Resolution 2417, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2730 (2024), underscoring the urgent need to protect humanitarian and UN personnel from violence, attacks, threats, and harassment. In reaffirming the obligations of all parties to a conflict to ensure the safety and freedom of movement of humanitarian actors and unimpeded access of humanitarian aid to those in need, the resolution sought to strengthen reporting mechanisms in cases of targeted attacks against humanitarian personnel and aid, requiring the UNSG to swiftly report to the Council where widespread issues concerning the protection of humanitarians and their assets arise. This resolution also highlights the importance of Member States aligning their domestic policies with international standards to safeguard the integrity and impartiality of humanitarian work, calling explicitly for the prosecution of those responsible for violating relevant provisions of IHL.

Despite the clear normative advances represented by these resolutions, their practical implementation continues to face substantial obstacles, with some strongly criticizing the weakness of these resolutions.⁸⁹ Political will fluctuates, enforcement mechanisms are weak, and their operationalization frequently come under attack. Overcoming these challenges requires sustained investment in early warning systems (which are not greatly reduced in the

wake of FEWS-NET being shut down), greater integration of PoC mandates into peacekeeping planning and training, and stronger partnerships with local actors who play a critical role in both monitoring violations and strengthening community resilience. It cannot be ignored that the proliferation of such resolutions aimed at the protection of civilians and OIS are simultaneously occurring in tandem with the rise of such conflicts where these tactics are perpetrated with total impunity.

Taken together, Resolutions 2417, 2573, and 2730 in theory could deepen the legal framework for civilian protection, and offer pathways for preventing, deterring such conduct and hold perpetrators accountable, improving the protection of civilians and humanitarians in some of the world's most dangerous contexts. In practice, their full implementation remains a pressing imperative for the international community, which must involve regional, national and local stakeholders.



7. THE ONGOING PATH TO ACCOUNTABILITY

The longstanding perception of starvation as an unavoidable by-product of war has shifted in recent years. Advances in legal accountability and policy discussions, together with increased international scrutiny driven by coalitions working against the rise of conflict and hunger has unmasked starvation as a deliberate strategy. Its criminality is slowly becoming more identifiable, as are efforts at holding perpetrators to account.

A key resource, developed by GRC's Starvation and Humanitarian Crisis Division, that aims to record and monitor these trends and further clearly reflects this shift is the Starvation Jurisprudence Digest. First released in 2019 and regularly updated, the Digest offers a detailed analysis of how UN Commissions of Inquiry (COIs), fact-finding missions (FFMs), and international tribunals have addressed starvation and associated violations and abuses. It compiles findings on conduct ranging from attacks on OIS, obstruction and denial of aid, siege warfare, and violations of economic and social rights—capturing how these acts impact food security and intersect with broader harms such as gender-based violence and forced displacement.

Starting from the paper "Sieges as a weapon of war: Encircle, starve, surrender, evacuate"⁹⁰ published by the UN COI on Syria in 2018 to the landmark report released by the now disbanded UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan in 2020, focusing on the use of starvation by both government forces and opposition armed groups,⁹¹ UN-mandated reports have increasingly recognized starvation not only as a humanitarian concern but as a deliberate tactic and strategy of war.⁹² They have also begun documenting how food insecurity affects dignity and safety, particularly for women and marginalized groups, revealing the compounded vulnerabilities individuals face when forced to obtain food under threat of violence.⁹³ This increased focus follows GRC's sustained engagement and training with fact-finding missions

and UN and European accountability mechanisms. This training relies on GRC's unique Starvation Training Manual and mobile App, which digests the law, best investigative practice in documentation, and outlines accountability pathways.

Meanwhile, state responsibility litigation is also beginning to incorporate starvation as a key component. In *South Africa v. Israel*, the ICJ's issued provisional measures cited the widespread destruction of vital infrastructure, massive scale of often repeated displacement of civilians within the Gaza Strip and noted that civilians in Gaza have no access to basic necessities, including food, water, medical supplies, electricity and heating, emphasizing the need for Israel to ensure and facilitate unimpeded and unhindered access of civilians to basic services and humanitarian aid.⁹⁴

Civil society efforts have also leveraged evidence of starvation to support legal actions against states supplying arms to parties accused of obstructing aid—highlighting the increasing recognition of starvation as both a legal and ethical red line. For instance, GRC's Humanitarian Crisis and Starvation Accountability Team, together with two independent experts, was asked to file an amicus curiae brief to support the appeal of Defense for Children International–Palestine, Al-Haq and Palestinian individuals, represented by the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR),⁹⁵ in a lawsuit filed in US federal courts against the Biden administration for its failure to prevent and complicity in the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza perpetrated by Israeli authorities and forces. The amicus brief outlined the customary prohibition on the use of starvation as a method of warfare, including as applicable to the context of Gaza, and how the starvation-related conduct may constitute an underlying act of genocide.⁹⁶

In May 2024, the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC made history by filing the arrest warrant applications against Israeli Prime Minister

Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, alleging the use of starvation as a method of warfare in Gaza under Article 8(2)(b)(xxv) of the Rome Statute. The arrest warrants were both later issued and confirmed by the ICC's Pre Trial Chamber I on 21 November 2024. This marks the first time the ICC has brought a starvation charge as a standalone war crime. The move follows other developments at the ICC, including the issuance of arrest warrants for Russian high-level commanders, Sergei Ivanovich Kobylash and Viktor Nikolayevich Sokolov, involved in concerted attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure.⁹⁷ The issuance of these warrants recognises the importance of addressing the systematic targeting of Ukraine's critical infrastructure, essential to the delivery of OIS and ensures civilians' access to

OIS, further indicating the Court's growing focus on the protection of OIS, critical infrastructure and starvation.

While significant work remains to ensure consistent prevention, deterrence and accountability through investigations and prosecutions, these developments signal a growing international consensus: starvation in armed conflict is neither incidental nor acceptable; it is a serious violation demanding legal accountability. Despite this emerging consensus, meaningful action remains wholly insufficient to address or even mitigate the scale and gravity of civilian suffering that the use of starvation by warring parties brings about across a range of ongoing armed conflicts today.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND CALLS TO ACTION



The deliberate use of starvation as a method of warfare, as discussed in the present paper, underscores critical deficiencies in the international system's ability to uphold humanitarian law and protect civilian populations. Despite existing legal prohibitions under the Geneva Conventions and ICL and UNSC resolutions, enforcement has been inconsistent, and accountability mechanisms remain weak or politicized. Starvation tactics persist not due to a lack of normative clarity, but because of gaps in compliance, monitoring, and consequences for violations. The UN system, with

its unique mandate and reach, must move beyond reactive responses and adopt a more proactive, coordinated, and enforceable approach to prevent the use of starvation as a weapon. Addressing these structural shortcomings is essential to ensure protection for civilians in ongoing and future conflicts. In light of these challenges, the following calls for action are made to enhance the effectiveness and credibility of the UN system in preventing and responding to the use of starvation against civilians.⁹⁸

Preventative Measures:

- 1. Support the establishment of a designated UNSC 2417 focal point⁹⁹** (such as a Special Envoy or an Independent Expert Mechanism) to lead and coordinate reporting on conflict, starvation, and the protection of humanitarian personnel and assets. Establishing a focal point is essential to securing clear and effective leadership on this agenda, and ensuring meaningful and safe, centralised coordination on data-gathering and reporting across diverse stakeholders, including the various entities working on food security and humanitarian aid, the Group of Friends (GoF) for Action on Conflict and Hunger, and member states active on, and supportive of, this agenda. The appointment of a Special Envoy would further be useful in facilitating 'quiet diplomacy' that might usefully enable access to those cut off from food assistance in conflict settings, as well as facilitate negotiations aimed at ceasefires and conflict-resolution efforts that underpin longer-term solutions.

In bringing together a wide array of data, evidence and information, the focal point would play a key role in developing a robust and broad-based understanding of the nexus between conflict and hunger and the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and other conflict dynamics. Identifying where, and under what conditions, actors with differing mandates have common ground is critical to identifying the scope and opportunities for cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination and information-sharing within the conflict and hunger space. GRC's view is that this focal point is critical for early engagement and proactive responses.

Specifically, a focal point could facilitate the following:

- *Enable the Special Envoy on UNSC 2417 to monitor and quickly inform the UNSC about conflict-induced food insecurity in armed conflicts.*
- *Establish an independent body of experts to collect and channel sensitive information and equip the Special Envoy, the UNSC and the UNSG to take preventative action.*

- *Provide support for engagement with UNSC 2417 among country-level humanitarian actors, towards protecting and providing a safe avenue for coordination for organisations actively participating in data-gathering and reporting as well as for humanitarian agencies that possess crucial information but whose aid and assistance mandate might be jeopardised should they be seen as reporting on the activities of warring parties.*
 - *Provide support for the development of guidelines for the implementation of UNSC 2417 at the field-level, to be used as an advocacy tool to encourage better compliance with the prohibition on starvation tactics by political and military actors, as well as a lobbying tool to promote action.*
 - *Provide support for an examination of the lessons learnt from data-gathering efforts to date, particularly regarding starvation violations. This could move towards identifying how these efforts have been effective and where they can be improved, and how actionable information must be collated and presented.*
- 2. Implement a transparent process by which UNSC 2417 is triggered:** Enhance formal reporting by requesting the UNSG to report to the UNSC within no more than 30 days, and thereafter every 30 days, on emerging situations, highlighting starvation-related violations and attacks against humanitarian personnel, facilities, aid and the denial or obstruction of humanitarian aid.
- The current reporting routes lack transparency. As such, supporting the publication of de-sensitised versions of the periodic OCHA White Papers and Council discussions around them, to increase public access, literacy and improve transparency, and show what action is being taken, would go some way to addressing these issues.
- 3. Harness the political will to act:** The resources expended on setting up the aforementioned mechanisms must be followed and accompanied by the political will to act. Member states and the GOF should galvanise all resources and diplomatic avenues towards triggering and actioning UNSC 2417, 2573, and 2730 in appropriate situations. It is worth highlighting that acting preventatively when there is a reasonable basis to do so does not require the UNSC to make a determination about whether any party to the conflict or individual is accountable for any violations of international law applicable during armed conflict.

Deterrent Measures:

- 1. Encourage states to ratify the starvation amendment to the Rome Statute,** which criminalises starvation in non-international armed conflicts. Wide ratification of the starvation amendment is critical to ensure accountability regardless of conflict designation. It further underscores a commitment to the protection of civilians, which has been a longstanding UNSC objective implemented over 20 years ago in UNSC 1265. To date 20 ICC States Parties have ratified the amendment.¹⁰⁰
- 2. Support capacity-building initiatives to increase understanding of the legal framework governing starvation as a method of warfare,** including by justice system actors, with a view to supporting the investigation and prosecution of starvation-related conduct at the international and domestic level, as outlined in UNSC Resolution 2573.
- 3. Take action against those who may violate international law with the full range of responses and interventions available under UNSC 2417,** including by placing pressure on parties to a conflict to comply with IHL, to protect civilians and civilian objects, and to facilitate humanitarian access; by imposing sanctions; by supporting or requesting investigations; and by referring appropriate situations to the ICC and domestic prosecuting authorities and war crimes units in countries which have active universal jurisdiction avenues.

- ¹ United Nations, Meetings coverage and press releases, [‘Adopting Resolution 2417 \(2018\), Security Council Strongly Condemns Starving of Civilians, Unlawfully Denying Humanitarian Access as Warfare Tactics’](#) (24 May 2018).
- ² World Food Programme, [‘Tens of millions at risk of extreme hunger and starvation as unprecedented funding crisis spirals’](#) (28 March 2025).; World Food Programme, [‘A global food crisis’](#).
- ³ United Nations Security Council, [Resolution 2417](#) (2018), adopted on 24 May 2018.
- ⁴ United Nations Security Council, [Resolution 2573](#) (2021), adopted on 27 April 2021.
- ⁵ United Nations Security Council, [Resolution 2730](#) (2024), adopted on 24 May 2024.
- ⁶ GRC, [Starvation Mobile Justice Team](#).
- ⁷ GRC’s [Starvation Jurisprudence Digest](#) offers up-to-date information on legal proceedings, investigations, and reports from Commissions of Inquiry (COIs), Fact-Finding Missions (FFMs), and Panels of Experts (PoEs). It provides crucial insights for legal practitioners, human rights bodies, humanitarian organisations, and victims, helping them navigate the legal landscape related to starvation and associated human rights violations.
- ⁸ GRC Launches the [Starvation Accountability App: A Unique Handheld Toolkit](#) for Field Practitioners (6 March 2023).
- ⁹ GRC’s Starvation Training Manual is a unique toolkit designed for a wide audience including professional investigators, human rights defenders, journalists, civil society organisations, academics, the military police officers, and humanitarian actors, interested in being able to identify the deliberate use of starvation, strengthen protection strategies, and insulate operations, reporting and responses. For individuals and organisations interested in the Manual or participating in our workshops and training programmes, visit <https://starvationaccountability.org/> or contact info@grcompliance.org.
- ¹⁰ Please note this has been a longstanding call by GRC, who have consistently championed the need for a focal point since 2019.
- ¹¹ On 6 December 2019, the Assembly of State Parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court unanimously voted to amend the Rome Statute to include starvation as a war crime in non-international armed conflicts. ICC ASP, [‘Resolution ICC-ASP/18/Res.5’](#) (6 December 2019). See also the [Starvation Accountability Ratification Portal](#) for a host of tools to facilitate ratification, including model letters and advocacy speaking points, as well as a [ratification tracker](#).
- ¹² World Food Programme, [‘Tens of millions at risk of extreme hunger and starvation as unprecedented funding crisis spirals’](#) (28 March 2025).
- ¹³ World Food Programme, [‘A global food crisis’](#).
- ¹⁴ See [IPC Mapping Tool](#).
- ¹⁵ World Food Programme, [‘A global food crisis’](#).
- ¹⁶ Ibidem. It is also important to note that more than 85% of people experiencing hunger crises live in conflict-affected countries, many of which are caused by disputes over food, water, or the resources needed to produce them. See Action Against Hunger, [‘Conflict’](#) (2025).
- ¹⁷ Insecurity Insight. 2025. Data Points: Reported Food-related Violence in 2024. Switzerland: Insecurity Insight.
- ¹⁸ World Food Programme, [‘Sudanese mark grim war milestone amid surging hunger, hopes for peace’](#) (14 April 2025).
- ¹⁹ OHCHR, [‘Sudan faces worsening humanitarian catastrophe as famine and conflict escalate: UN experts’](#) (14 April 2025).
- ²⁰ ICJ, [Public sitting on the Obligations of Israel in relation to the Presence and Activities of the United Nations, Other International Organizations and Third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#) (28 April 2025), p. 64, para 7.
- ²¹ World Food Programme, [‘WFP runs out of food stocks in Gaza as border crossings remain closed’](#) (25 April 2025).
- ²² ICJ, [Public sitting on the Obligations of Israel in relation to the Presence and Activities of the United Nations, Other International Organizations and Third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#) (28 April 2025), p. 59, para 36. New York Times, [‘In Private, Some Israeli Officers Admit That Gaza Is on the Brink of Starvation’](#), 13 May 2025.
- ²³ ICJ, [Public sitting on the Obligations of Israel in relation to the Presence and Activities of the United Nations, Other International Organizations and Third States in and in relation to the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#) (28 April 2025), p. 54, para 4.
- ²⁴ UNICEF, [Statement from UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell on the situation for children in the Gaza Strip after two months of aid blockade](#) (2 May 2025).
- ²⁵ UNRWA, [‘UNRWA Situation Report #170 on the Humanitarian Crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem’](#) (9 May 2025).
- ²⁶ ICJ, [‘Request for advisory opinion submitted by the General Assembly of the United Nations’](#) (28 April 2025).
- ²⁷ IPC, [‘GAZA STRIP: IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Special Snapshot’](#) (17 October 2024).
- ²⁸ ICRC, Commentary to Article 54 AP I, paras. 2102-2103; ICRC, Commentary to Article 14 AP II, paras. 4802-4803. Similarly, from an IHRL standpoint, the right to food and nutrition is also inextricably linked to the right to an adequate standard of living, right to water and housing, as well as the right to health, life and right to be free from torture and inhumane treatment.
- ²⁹ C. Mcgrath, Daily Express, [‘Putin using starvation and bombs in ‘merciless’ bid to ‘break’ Ukrainian people’](#) (2 June 2023); The Scotsman, [‘War against Ukraine: Russia used ‘starvation tactics’ on Ukrainian people, investigation claims’](#) (2 June 2023); A. Macis, CNBC, [‘Russian forces target food and water sources to starve Ukrainians, international law report says’](#) (2 June 2023); E. U. Ochab, Forbes, [‘The Use Of Starvation As A Weapon Of War By Russian Forces’](#) (2 June 2023); P. Amalaraj, Daily Star, [‘Russia’s vile crimes in Ukraine give me nightmares – they bombed 14 waiting for food’](#) (2 June 2023); E. Lyons, CBS News, [‘Russia used “starvation tactics” against Ukraine civilians, investigators claim in new war crime allegation’](#) (2 June 2023).

- ³⁰ See [United Shipbuilding Corps](#). Of note, United Shipbuilding Corporation and its senior executives were sanctioned by the United States in April 2022 for supplying weapons in support of Russia's war effort. The URL [source](#) of this information is no longer valid, but it has been preserved and it is on file with GRC.
- ³¹ B Diakun, '[Handysize bulk carrier joins Russia's grain plundering operation](#)' (10 February 2023). CMC bought three bulk carriers, the most heavily used ships in plundering operations, on December 9 2021, December 27 2021 and February 2022.
- ³² See [Bulk Carrier Guide](#).
- ³³ Telegram, [Post of MoD Russia](#) (30 April 2022); Telegram, [Post of RIA Novosti](#) (18 May 2022).
- ³⁴ Telegram, [Post of Soloviev](#) (21 July 2023).
- ³⁵ The World Bank, the Government of Ukraine, the European Union, the United Nations, '[UKRAINE Fourth Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment \(RDNA4\)](#)', February 2022-December 2024, p.122; See also FAO, '[Food security and agricultural livelihoods assessment \(December 2023\) – Monitoring report](#)', December 2023.
- ³⁶ Some of the same military personnel, including high ranking personnel, were involved both in Syria and later on in Ukraine. See, for instance, The Guardian, '[Aleksandr Dvornikov: Russian general who helped turn tide of Syrian war](#)' (10 April 2022); The Washington Post, '[What to know about Russia's new top commander in Ukraine](#)' (10 April 2022).
- ³⁷ United Nations Palestine, '[Gaza: 'Unprecedented and unparalleled' civilian death toll: Guterres](#)' (20 November 2023).
- ³⁸ OCHA, '[Reported impact snapshot | Gaza Strip](#)' (15 April 2025)
- ³⁹ Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF), '[Gaza has become a "mass grave" for Palestinians and those helping them](#)' (16 April 2025). See also, UNRWA, '[UNRWA Situation Report #170 on the Humanitarian Crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem](#)' (9 May 2025).
- ⁴⁰ UNRWA, '[UNRWA Situation Report #166 on the Humanitarian Crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem](#)' (4 April 2025).
- ⁴¹ OCHA, '[Reported impact snapshot | Gaza Strip](#)' (15 April 2025)
- ⁴² World Bank Group, Joint World Bank, '[UN Report Assesses Damage to Gaza's Infrastructure](#)' (2 April 2024).
- ⁴³ Al Jazeera, '[Israeli defence minister orders 'complete siege' on Gaza](#)' (9 October 2023).
- ⁴⁴ The Guardian, '[We're focused on maximum damage': ground offensive into Gaza seems imminent](#)' (10 October 2023); The Times of Israel, '[Gallant: Israel moving to full offense, Gaza will never go back to what it once was](#)' (10 October 2023); Amnesty International, '[Global: Social media companies must step up crisis response on Israel-Palestine as online hate and censorship proliferate](#)' (27 October 2023).
- ⁴⁵ See [Youtube](#) video (in Hebrew), cited in '[Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel](#)', (UN Doc. A/HRC/56/26, 27 May 2024), para. 44.
- ⁴⁶ The Guardian, '[No plans to allow any aid into Gaza, says Israeli minister](#)' (17 April 2025).
- ⁴⁷ UN News, '[Gaza: Starvation looms for one in five people, say food security experts](#)' (12 May 2025).
- ⁴⁸ X, [Post of Medical Aid for Palestinians](#) (29 February 2024).
- ⁴⁹ ICJ, Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), [Order](#) (28 March 2024), para 45.
- ⁵⁰ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, '[SIEGES AS A WEAPON OF WAR: Encircle, starve, surrender, evacuate](#)' (29 May 2018).
- ⁵¹ See generally, HRC, '[Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#)' (UN Doc A/HRC/39/65, 9 August 2018).
- ⁵² Amnesty International UK, SYRIA, '[Inside Yarmouk: Life under siege](#)' (1 April 2025).
- ⁵³ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, '[SIEGES AS A WEAPON OF WAR: Encircle, starve, surrender, evacuate](#)' (29 May 2018).
- ⁵⁴ See, e.g., Casimir Pulaski Foundation, '[Russian Approach to Siege Warfare in Practice - Kyiv vs. Mariupol](#)' (6 December 2022); Rand Corporation, '[The Russian Way of Warfare, A Primer](#)' (7 December 2017).
- ⁵⁵ See generally, HRC, '[Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#)' (UN Doc. A/HRC/34/64, 2 February 2017).
- ⁵⁶ See, e.g., Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, '[Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting From Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February - July 2022](#)' (2022), p. 34.
- ⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch, '["Our City Was Gone" Russia's Devastation of Mariupol, Ukraine](#)' (February 2024), p. 37; Rand Corporation, '[The Russian Way of Warfare, A Primer](#)' (7 December 2017), p. 7.
- ⁵⁸ See generally, HRC, '[Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic](#)' (UN Doc. A/HRC/34/64, 2 February 2017) and para. 7.
- ⁵⁹ For more information, see GRC, '["The Hope Left Us:" Russia's Siege, Starvation, and Capture of Mariupol City](#)' (13 June 2024).
- ⁶⁰ *Id.*
- ⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, '[No Exit in Gaza - Left With No Other Options, Residents Should Have a Right to Flee](#)' (1 April 2024).
- ⁶² Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, '[Detailed findings on the military operations and attacks carried out in the Occupied Palestinian Territory from 7 October to 31 December 2023](#)' A/HRC/56/CRP.4 (10 June 2024), para. 20.

- ⁶³ In October 2022, GRC's Starvation and Humanitarian Crisis Division released its report documenting the use of starvation in the context of the conflict and encirclement of Tigray in Ethiopia. GRC, ['An OSINT Investigation of Starvation Crimes in Tigray'](#) (4 October 2022).
- ⁶⁴ ICRC, ['What is International Humanitarian Law?'](#) (July 2004), p. 1.
- ⁶⁵ The applicability is triggered by the existence of factual circumstances irrespective of any formalities such as a declaration of war. For criteria of determination of the existence of an armed conflict, see M. Sassòli, *International Humanitarian Law: Rules, Controversies, and Solutions to Problems Arising in Warfare* (Edward Elgar 2019) ('Sassòli IHL'), pp. 169, 176, 180, 183.
- ⁶⁶ [Customary IHL: Rules](#), Rule 156.
- ⁶⁷ "It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless [for the purpose of starving civilians as a method of combat], objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population."
- ⁶⁸ See Additional Protocol I, Art 70 (2).
- ⁶⁹ See Additional Protocol I, Art 54; Additional Protocol II, Art 14. See also ICRC Commentary to Additional Protocol I, Art 70, para. 2795.
- ⁷⁰ E.-C. Gillard, Chatham House, ['Seventy Years of the Geneva Conventions What of the Future?'](#) (March 2020), p. 7.
- ⁷¹ OHCHR, ['International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law Relevant to Siege Warfare'](#) (January 2017).
- ⁷² Panel of Experts in International Law Convened by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, ['Report of the Panel of Experts in International Law'](#) (20 May 2024), para. 28.
- ⁷³ ['San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea'](#) (1994), paras. 102(a), 103.
- ⁷⁴ ['Newport Manual on the Law of Naval Warfare'](#) (2023), para. 7.4.5.
- ⁷⁵ This article criminalizes "Intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions."
- ⁷⁶ Article 8(2)(e)(ix) is identical to Article 8(2)(b)(xxv), save the characterisation of the armed conflict the act occurs in.
- ⁷⁷ See Art. 8(2)(b)(xxv), ICC Elements of Crimes.
- ⁷⁸ While there has not yet been an international prosecution for the war crime of starvation, see Section 7 on relevant developments at the ICC. Further, noting that whilst the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) and the ICTY did adjudicate upon starvation, it did so in the context of alternative crimes, starvation as such not being a crime on the statutes of the respective courts. It seems that only two prosecutions of the modern era have pleaded starvation as a distinct crime, all at the national level: District Court in Zadar, Croatia, Verdict, [Public Prosecutor v. M.P. et al](#) (K. 74/96), 24 April 1997; and Federal High Court, Ethiopia File No. 1/87 Special Prosecutor v. Col. Mengistu Hailamariam et al. (2006).
- ⁷⁹ S. Hutter, ['Starvation in Armed Conflicts: An Analysis Based on the Right to Food'](#) (2019) 17 *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 723 ('Hutter, 'Starvation in Armed Conflicts'), pp. 734-735. Under certain circumstances, some argue that non-state actors also bear human rights obligations. See [Non-State Actors Obligations](#) at p. 19.
- ⁸⁰ Article 25 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights states that "[e]veryone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food...Children and mothers are entitled to special care and assistance."
- ⁸¹ Article 11(1) of International Covenant of Economic Social and Cultural Rights lists adequate food and housing as essential to the universal right to an adequate standard of living.
- ⁸² OHCHR, [The Core International Human Rights Instruments and their Monitoring Bodies](#). Additional protocols broaden or reinforce the obligations contained within a treaty. They are not standalone agreements, and work in conjunction with the treaty to which they are appended.
- ⁸³ Article 38(1) and (4) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child ('CRC') requires state parties to respect IHL applicable to children in an armed conflict. The incorporation of IHL into the CRC covers the prohibition of using starvation as a method of warfare. It is also recognised under various other human rights treaties including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- ⁸⁴ GRC, ['A Framework for Documenting, Investigating, Advocating for, and Seeking Reparations for Starvation-Related Crimes and Economic, Social and Cultural Human Rights Violations'](#) (24 March 2025).
- ⁸⁵ UN Economic and Social Council, ['Report on the right to adequate food as a human right submitted by Mr. Asbjorn Eide, Special Rapporteur'](#), UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub. 2/1987/23 (7 July 1987); [CESCR General Comment No. 12](#), para. 15; [CESCR General Comment No. 14](#), paras. 34-37; [CESCR General Comment No. 15](#), paras. 20-29. See also International Commission of Jurists, Morgan Institute on Human Rights, and Maastricht University, ['Maastricht Guidelines on Violations of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights'](#) (January 22-26, 1997).
- ⁸⁶ [Maastricht Guidelines](#), para. 14.
- ⁸⁷ [Maastricht Guidelines](#), para. 15.
- ⁸⁸ [UNSC Resolution 2417](#) (2018), para. 12.
- ⁸⁹ World Peace Foundation, ['How Not to End Mass Starvation'](#) (24 May 2022).
- ⁹⁰ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, ['SIEGES AS A WEAPON OF WAR: Encircle, starve, surrender, evacuate'](#) (29 May 2018).
- ⁹¹ Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, ['There is nothing left for us': starvation as a method of warfare in South Sudan](#), Conference room paper (5 October 2020).

⁹² Noting as well the UN 2014 landmark report on DPRK which analyses starvation outside of a conflict setting as a crime against humanity, A/HRC/25/CRP.1, [‘Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’](#) (7 February 2014).

⁹³ Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, [“There is nothing left for us”: starvation as a method of warfare in South Sudan](#), Conference room paper (5 October 2020), para. 139.

⁹⁴ International Court of Justice, Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip – requests for the indication of provisional measures, [Order of 26 January 2024](#).

⁹⁵ In the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, Case No. 24-704, Defense for Children International-Palestine et al v. Biden et al, [Amicus Curiae Brief of Global Rights Compliance, Lina Baddour, and Tom Dannenbaum in support of appellants and reversal](#) (14 March 2024).

⁹⁶ United States District Court for the Northern District of California, Case No: 3:23-cv-5829, [Defense for Children International-Palestine et al v. Biden et al](#) (13 November 2023); Furthermore another example includes, the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) and Al-Haq filing a [legal action](#) against the United Kingdom government to halt weapons sales to Israel over illegal attacks on civilians besieged in Gaza, including allegations of indiscriminate attacks, starvation, forced displacement, and the serious risk of genocide. See GLAN, [‘UK Weapons Sales to Israel’](#).

⁹⁷ GRC Website, [‘Global Rights Compliance welcomes the ICC’s issuance of arrest warrants against two high-level Russian commanders for concerted attacks against Ukrainian electric infrastructure’](#) (6 March 2024).

⁹⁸ See also, GRC’s [Guidance Note: Strengthening UN Security Council action under Resolution 2417 to break the cycle of conflict-induced hunger](#) (9 March 2021).

⁹⁹ Please note this has been a longstanding call by GRC, who have consistently championed the need for his focal point since 2019.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations Treaty Collection, Chapter XVIII, Penal Matters, [10. g Amendment to article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court \(Intentionally using starvation of civilians\)](#) (6 December 2019). See also the Starvation Accountability [Ratification Portal](#) for a host of tools to facilitate ratification, including model letters and advocacy speaking points, as well as a [ratification tracker](#).