



Oral statement to the Human Rights Committee on the Violations of Civil and Political Rights in the U.S. Stemming from Right to Food Violations

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I speak today on behalf of the University of Miami Human Rights Clinic, WhyHunger, West Virginia University Center for Resilient Communities, and the National Right to Food Community of Practice, which is a coalition of food justice advocates, small farmers, attorneys, legislators, scholars, and people with lived experiences of hunger and food insecurity.

I am here to call attention to violations of the right to life related to the discriminatory deprivation of access to food that poor, Black, brown, and Indigenous communities face in the U.S. Female-headed households, children, farmworkers and other food system workers, people experiencing homelessness, and incarcerated people are consistently the most affected in every state in the U.S.

This Committee’s General Comment No. 36 on the Right to Life explains that positive measures “to address adequate conditions for protecting the right to life include, where necessary, measures designed to ensure access without delay by individuals to essential goods and services such as food.”

These violations begin in early childhood and can have lifelong impacts. Infants whose mothers are incarcerated suffer higher mortality rates because they are deprived of their mothers’ breastmilk. Malnutrition in schoolchildren can cause behavioral and health effects. These effects create barriers to success for these children and fuel the school to prison pipeline.

The food system in the U.S. relies heavily on the cheap labor of immigrant farm workers and incarcerated people, who perform hard labor in dangerous conditions. This system benefits the

corporations who dominate the U.S. food system and ensures that the individuals whose labor supports this system are entirely excluded from its benefits.

The criminalization of homelessness and increasing bans on distribution of food to these communities in the U.S. further enables right to food violations and puts vulnerable people at extreme risk.

Government assistance programs currently in place are entirely failing to address the root causes of food insecurity and hunger, and instead are continuing a cycle of dependence and charitable reliance instead of facilitating and promoting food autonomy.

Repeatedly, the U.S. has implemented legislation that discriminates against Black and brown people, hindering these communities' ability to participate in the land market and build generational wealth.

To fulfill its obligations as a State Party to the ICCPR, the U.S. should adopt a human rights-based national plan to end hunger that incorporates strong civic participation from those most affected, and that addresses the history of enslaved, demeaned, and incarcerated food system labor in the U.S. By working to end systemic, discriminatory, nationwide right to food violations fueled by the current industrial food system, the U.S. has an opportunity to protect the health, well-being, and lives of the nation's most vulnerable communities.