Committee: World Food Programme
Topic: “International Accountability Mechanisms for the Deliberate Obstruction of Humanitarian Food Aid”
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Overview of the Problem

According to the International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited under the Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols (1977). The deliberate obstruction of humanitarian food aid is a serious international issue that occurs when governments, armed groups, or other actors intentionally prevent food from reaching civilians who need it. This can happen during wars, occupations, sieges, blockades, or other humanitarian emergencies. For example, historical contexts such as the bureaucratic delays at Yemen's ports or the fact blockades on food convoys during the Tigray conflict illustrate how these tactics manifest in practice. According to the United Nations, at least 326 humanitarian personnel were killed across 21 countries in 2025, bringing the total to more than 1,010 over three years (United Nations, 2026). Evidently these actions can increase hunger, malnutrition, displacement, and preventable deaths. The main parties involved include national governments, armed groups, the United Nations, humanitarian organizations, international courts, and the communities affected by food insecurity. Organizations like the World Food Programme, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and the International Committee of the Red Cross play a vital role in delivering assistance and protecting civilians. While the World Food Programme manages logistics and monitoring, it possesses no juridical power and must partner with international tribunals to hold perpetrators accountable. The relevant questions include what happened, who was responsible, what they intended, which legal rules applied, and whether the required elements of an offense can be established.

Delegates can focus primarily on how the international community can find ways to ensure that existing laws are properly respected and enforced, holding the individuals involved accountable, and ensuring that humanitarian personnel fulfill their missions effectively, without any obstacle or harm. Modifying the protocols for delivering

humanitarian aid may be a way to protect neutral humanitarian operations and improve access to humanitarian negotiations so that everyone has the necessary aid access to it.

Introduction

Food is a basic human need, yet during armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies, governments can play an important role in determining whether people receive the food they need to survive. Through border controls, permits, security policies, and decisions about humanitarian access, governments can either help food reach civilians or create obstacles that delay or prevent its delivery. When these restrictions are deliberately used to deprive civilians of essential supplies, the situation can become a serious humanitarian and legal issue (United Nations Security Council, 2018). Deliberate obstruction occurs when governments or other actors intentionally prevent, delay, or interfere with the delivery of this assistance. Determining whether an action is unlawful requires examining the circumstances, the applicable legal rules, and the available evidence. (International Committee of the Red Cross ICRC, 1949, 1977). International accountability mechanisms are the systems used to investigate violations of international law and determine who is responsible.They are important because governments and individuals should be held accountable when their actions meet the legal requirements for responsibility. However, accountability can be difficult when governments refuse to cooperate with investigations or when political disagreements prevent international action (International Criminal Court ICC, 1998; United Nations, 1945). The international community should care about this issue because government decisions can have serious consequences for civilian populations. When food aid is blocked or deliberately restricted, families may face hunger, children may suffer from malnutrition, and entire communities may be forced to leave their homes. International humanitarian law prohibits starving civilians as a method of warfare, and certain violations may constitute war crimes when the required legal conditions are met (ICRC, 1977; ICC, 1998). This issue also raises important questions about state sovereignty and international responsibility. Governments have authority over their territories and borders, but they must also respect their obligations under international law. The

challenge is to ensure that states can address legitimate security concerns without using them as a reason to unlawfully deny civilians access to essential humanitarian assistance. The committee will discuss how governments can be encouraged to cooperate with investigations, improve humanitarian access, and strengthen existing accountability mechanisms. Delegates should consider what role the United Nations should play when a government is suspected of deliberately obstructing food aid, how international law can be enforced fairly, and what measures can be taken when states refuse to cooperate.

Historical Background

Throughout history, governments and military leaders have used control over food, trade routes, and access to territory as ways to weaken their opponents. During sieges and blockades, food supplies have sometimes been restricted to pressure enemy forces. However, civilians have often suffered the consequences , even when they were not directly involved in the fighting. Over time, the international community recognized the need to establish rules limiting how governments and armed forces conduct warfare and treat civilian populations (ICRC, 1949, 1977). An important development occurred in 1949, when states adopted the four Geneva Conventions. These agreements established international rules for protecting people affected by armed conflict. The Fourth Geneva Convention includes provisions addressing relief supplies and assistance for civilian populations in certain circumstances, including specific obligations concerning occupied territories. These rules helped establish that governments and other parties to a conflict have responsibilities toward civilians, even when military operations are taking place (ICRC, 1949).

In 1977, Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions strengthened these protections by explicitly prohibiting the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in international armed conflicts. Another major step occurred in 1998, when states adopted the Rome Statute, establishing the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Statue created a system for prosecuting individuals accused of certain serious international crimes. This was important because government officials and military leaders may face

individual criminal responsibility for crimes within the Court's jurisdiction; holding a government institution politically responsible is not the same as proving the criminal responsibility of a particular person (ICC, 1998). In 2018, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2417, recognizing the relationship between armed conflict, hunger, and food insecurity. The resolution condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and called for greater attention to violations of international humanitarian law. It also emphasized the importance of humanitarian access and accountability. The resolution demonstrated that governments have a collective responsibility, through the United Nations and within their respective legal obligations, to address the consequences of conflict-related hunger (United Nations Security Council, 2018). In 2019, an amendment to the Rome Statute expanded the list of war crimes covered by the ICC to include intentionally using starvation against civilians in certain non-international armed conflicts. This development strengthened the legal framework, although the Court's jurisdiction still depends on specific conditions, including the applicable jurisdictional rules and the legal status of the amendment for the situation concerned (ICC, 2019). Despite these developments, enforcing international law remains difficult. Some governments reject allegations against them, limit access for humanitarian organizations, or refuse to cooperate with international investigations. At the same time, governments may argue that restrictions are necessary for national security, making it important to examine the facts and evidence before reaching legal conclusions. This issue shows that international agreements alone cannot guarantee that civilians will receive humanitarian assistance. Governments must implement their legal obligations, cooperate with credible investigations, and allow humanitarian organizations to operate in accordance with international law. Delegates should therefore focus on how existing mechanisms can be encouraged to cooperate and how accountability can be improved without delaying urgent food assistance to civilians.

The Situation Today

Conflict-related hunger remains a major international concern. The 2026 Global Report on Food Crises confirmed that famine occurred in parts of both the Gaza Strip and

Sudan during 2025, the first time in the report's ten-year history that two famines were confirmed in the same year. The report also identified continuing famine risks in Gaza, Sudan, and South Sudan during 2026 (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], WFP, and Global Network Against Food Crises [GNAFC], 2026). The cases below illustrate different ways conflict affects food access. They should not all be treated as proven examples of the crime of starvation or deliberate obstruction. Humanitarian data describe needs and access conditions; a criminal finding requires a separate legal assessment.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) reported that between middle April and 30 June 2026, more than 1.2 million people in Gaza Strip (59% of the population) faced crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above). For July to December 2026, the IPC projected that more than 1.4 million people, or 67% of the population, could face crisis or worse conditions, including approximately 212,000 people in emergency (IPC Phase 4) (IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification), 2026).

The IPC noted that large-scale assistance following the October 2025 ceasefire had improved food security and nutrition, but needs remained high, and access remained unstable. It called for sustained, predictable, and unhindered entry of humanitarian supplies through all border crossings. These findings show the importance of reliable access and the fragility of improvements. They do not determine a person's criminal liability by themselves; to do so, it is necessary to investigate the conduct, intent, applicable law, and jurisdiction.

Sudan continues to face one of the world's largest food crises. On May 15, 2026, FAO, WFP, and UNICEF reported that nearly 19.5 million people (about two out of every five people in the country) were experiencing acute food insecurity at IPC Phase 3 or above. The analysis also identified approximately 135,000 people facing catastrophic food insecurity(IPC Phase 5) across 14 hotspots in Darfur and South Kordofan, with these areas at risk of famine in the coming months (FAO, 2026; WFP, 2026; UNICEF, 2026).

The crisis is driven by several connected factors, including fighting, displacement, disrupted livelihoods, limited humanitarian access, and inadequate assistance. Sudan demonstrates why monitoring must record specific obstacles rather than treating every

instance of food insecurity as deliberate obstruction. Evidence about the actor, the action, and the intention is necessary before assigning legal responsibility.

A specific incident in Jonglei State illustrates direct interference with a humanitarian food convoy. On September 29, 2026, armed youth in Chuibong threatened and assaulted two humanitarian staff members while blocking a river convoy from reaching Mogok in Ayod Country (WFP, 2026). WFP reported that 162.54 metric tons of food assistance, intended to feed 19,590 vulnerable people for one month, were forcibly offloaded under duress. The remaining team and other food cargo were returned safely to Malakal (WFP, 2026). This incident shows how local armed actors and failures to guarantee safe passage can interrupt assistance even after negotiations. It also demonstrates the importance of protecting aid workers and preserving operational records. The WFP statement describes an obstruction incident; any determination of individual criminal responsibility would require investigation by competent authorities.

Yemen's 2026 humanitarian needs remain severe. The 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan estimated that 18.3 million people faced more acute food insecurity. WFP also reported that 2.2 million children under five faced acute malnutrition (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA, 2026]; WFP, 2026).
In Ukraine, the UN estimates that 10.8 million people would need humanitarian assistance in 2026. Frontline areas and northern border regions continued to face serious needs because of attacks, damage to civilian infrastructure, displacement, and distribution of essential services (United Nations in Ukraine, 2026). WFP provides food and cash assistance to people affected by the war (WFP, n.d.).
Ukraine is useful as a comparative case of conflict-related humanitarian need. Damage, insecurity, and disrupted supply chains can restrict access without necessarily proving that food aid has been deliberately obstructed as a method of warfare. Delegates should use precise language and avoid making legal conclusions that go beyond the available evidence. The safety of humanitarian workers is directly connected to the delivery of food aid. Attacks, threats, intimidation, and restrictions can prevent

organizations from reaching communities and can weaken the entire humanitarian response.

Key Stakeholders and Their Positions

- Countries**:** Countries such as Palestine, Yemen (2026,October 29), and Sudan's neighboring crisis-affected regions are concerned about food insecurity and humanitarian access, while countries such as the United States, Germany, France, and Japan focus on international assistance and humanitarian funding. China emphasizes national sovereignty and international cooperation. Although their positions differ, all countries have an interest in improving food security and protecting civilians.
- International groups: World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations (UN) promotes cooperation, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) coordinates humanitarian responses , International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Criminal Court (ICC)
- Nonprofit Organizations**:** Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF,2025), Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International. These organizations help vulnerable communities and bring attention to humanitarian problems.
- Businesses: Food suppliers, transportation companies, and logistics companies help provide transport and distribute humanitarian supplies. Their main interests are maintaining safe supply chains and cooperating with humanitarian organizations.
- Regular People: The most affected people are civilians living in conflict areas, especially children, families, refugees, displaced people, and farmers. They need access to food, safety, and humanitarian assistance.

Each group has different priorities. Governments want to protect their national interests, international organizations focus on humanitarian assistance, non-profit organizations defend human rights, and businesses maintain supply chains. Meanwhile, civilians

simply need food and protection. Despite their differences, cooperation is necessary to ensure humanitarian aid reaches those who need it.

Past Attempts and Existing Frameworks

The international community has developed practical mechanisms to protect humanitarian operations, facilitate the movement of aid and obstacles created by sanctions. However, these measures address different problems and do not always lead to accountability for deliberate obstruction.

In 2024, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2730 to strengthen the protection of humanitarian and United Nations personnel. It calls on States and parties to armed conflict to respect their legal obligations, investigate attacks against aid workers and improve information sharing. It also requests recommendations from the Secretary-General on preventing attacks and strengthening accountability. This resolution provides a framework for protecting humanitarian workers, but it does not establish a separate court or directly punish those responsible for violations (United Nations Security Council [UNSC],2024)

Another important measure concerns the relationship between sanctions and humanitarian assistance. Resolution 2664 (2022) established a humanitarian exemption to certain UN asset-freeze measures. Resolution 2761 (2024) confirmed that this expedition would continue to apply to the ISIL (Da'esh) and Al-qaida sanctions regime. This helps humanitarian organizations carry out activities without being unintentionally blocked by sanctions. However, the exception does not remove sanctions or apply automatically to every national or international restriction (UNSC,2022,2024)

Regional arrangements have also attempted to make aid delivery more predictable. In Syria, Security Council Resolution 2165 (2014) authorized UN agencies and their partners to deliver humanitarian assistance through specified border crossing and established a monitoring mechanism to verify that relief shipments were humanitarian in nature. The arrangement helped create an alternative route for delivering assistance, but its operation depended on periodic Security Council authorizations and political agreements (UNSC, 2014). In Yemen, the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM), operational since 2016, was created to review clearance requests and inspect commercial shipments and bilateral assistance destined for certain ports. Its

purpose is to facilitate the movement of goods while maintaining the required inspection procedure. However, inspection and clearance mechanisms cannot guarantee access to every area or prevent all forms of interference once aid enters the country (UNVIM, n.d.).

These examples show that international mechanisms can improve worker protection, clarify humanitarian exemptions, and facilitate the movement of supplies. However, important gaps remain. Existing arrangements do not provide a single system to document deliberate obstruction, preserve evidence, identify those responsible, and ensure that cases reach competent investigative or judicial authorities. Political disagreements, limited cooperation, and the lack of enforcement powers can also prevent existing measures from producing consequences. The main challenge is therefore to connect humanitarian monitoring access.

Challenges and Complications

One of the greatest legal challenges is distinguishing deliberate starvation or obstruction from the effects of active combat, insecurity, damaged infrastructure, or genuine logistical difficulties. Investigators may need to examine patterns of conduct, statements, orders, repeated denials, the foreseeable consequences of restrictions, and the availability of alternatives. Hunger alone does not prove intent or criminal responsibility. Parties to a conflict may have legitimate security concerns, including the need to inspect consignments or coordinate movements. However, controls must be assessed under the applicable legal rules and cannot be used as a pretext for arbitrary or prolonged obstruction. The practical challenge is to protect legitimate security interests while ensuring that relief reaches civilians in need.

In many conflicts, territory and routes are controlled by several armed groups, local authorities, or competing institutions. A convoy may receive permission from one actor but be blocked by another. This makes negotiations, attribution, and accountability more difficult. Agreements should identify who is responsible for safe passage and establish clear communication channels. Investigators may be unable to enter affected areas, interview witnesses, or inspect sites. Evidence may be lost as conditions change. Humanitarian organizations may possess operational records, but those records must be handled carefully, with attention to consent, confidentiality, data protection, and the

safety of affected people. Humanitarian workers should not be turned into investigators in ways that undermine their ability to deliver assistance.

International mechanisms depend on political cooperation. Disagreements among Security Council members can block or weaken collective action. The ICC relies on state cooperation, while national courts may lack capacity, independence, or access to evidence. As a result, legal rules can exist without timely enforcement. Humanitarian organizations must be able to negotiate with different parties to reach civilians. Public accusations may sometimes affect access or expose staff and communities to risk. At the same time, silence can leave serious patterns undocumented. Organizations need clear policies for factual reporting, secure information sharing, and referrals to competent mechanisms while preserving their humanitarian principles.

Financial institutions and suppliers may avoid transactions connected to conflict areas because they fear violating sanctions or counterterrorism laws. This can create delays even when humanitarian activity is lawful. Humanitarian exemptions and clear guidance and communication with financial actors can reduce these unintended effects, removing legitimate safeguards.

The Committee's Role and Powers

The World Food Programme plays an important role in fighting hunger and providing food assistance to people affected by wars and humanitarian emergencies. Its main responsibility is to ensure that food reaches vulnerable communities, especially when governments or armed groups create difficulties for humanitarian operations. The committee can discuss solutions to improve food distribution, encourage governments to cooperate, protect humanitarian workers, and promote respect for international humanitarian law. It coordinates food assistance with governments and humanitarian organizations, recommends solutions to improve humanitarian access, monitors food insecurity and identifies communities in need, and encourages governments to cooperate and respect international humanitarian law. Delegates will work together to create a resolution containing proposals to address the deliberate obstruction of humanitarian food aid. It may include recommendations for better food distribution,

international cooperation, monitoring systems, and protection for humanitarian workers. The WFP cooperates with the organizations such as the United Nations (UN), OCHA, and the ICRC to coordinate humanitarian assistance and improve access to affected communities. The WFP is a humanitarian agency, not a court or law-enforcement organization. It cannot arrest government officials, impose sanctions, or punish countries. Its work depends on funding, government cooperation, and safe access to affected areas. The main goal of the committee is to ensure that humanitarian food assistance reaches civilians in need while encouraging governments to respect their international responsibilities.

Guiding Questions for Debate

1. How can the international community distinguish deliberate obstruction of humanitarian food aid from legitimate security restrictions, active combat, or logistical difficulties?
2. What common indicators and reporting standards should humanitarian organizations use to document delays, denials, attacks, division, and other forms of interference with food assistance?
3. How can states and non-state armed groups be encouraged to guarantee safe, rapid, and sustained humanitarian access in areas under their control?
4. What measures can improve the protection of humanitarian personnel, convoys, warehouses, and food distribution points, in line with Security Council Resolution 2730 (2024)?
5. How can the WFP, OCHA, the ICRC, and independent investigative bodies cooperate while protecting humanitarian neutrality, confidentiality, and the safety of witnesses?
6. What steps can states take to strengthen national investigations and prosecutions of alleged violations involving starvation or deliberate obstruction of relief?
7. Under what conditions may the ICC exercise jurisdiction over the war crime of starvation of civilians, and how can States improve cooperation with the Court?

8. How can humanitarian exemptions to sanctions and counterterrorism measures be made clear and effective so that lawful food assistance is not unintentionally blocked?
9. What safeguards should govern the collection, preservation, and sharing of information about alleged obstruction so that evidence remains reliable and affected communities are protected?
10. What practical monitoring, early warning, and humanitarian access arrangements should the WFP promote to identify and prevent the deliberate obstruction of food assistance?

Conclusion and Call to Action

The deliberated obstruction of the humanitarian food aid challenges both the humanitarian system and the international legal order. Existing rules prohibit starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, protect objects essential to civilian survival, and establish duties concerning humanitarian relief. The Rome Statute also provides for individual criminal responsibility in defined circumstances. Yet the existence of their rules does not guarantee access or accountability.

The examples examined in this paper show that food insecurity can result from different combinations of conflict, displacement, economic collapse, damaged infrastructure, insecurity, and restrictions on humanitarian access. Some incidents provide specific evidence of direct interference with relief operations; others illustrate the broader conditions that make food assistance difficult to deliver. Delegates must distinguish these situations and avoid declaring criminal responsibility without sufficient evidence.

The WFP cannot replace courts or enforcement bodies. Its contribution lies in protecting the humanitarian operation: assessing needs, delivering assistance, negotiating access, monitoring food security, coordinating partners, and documenting operational obstacles. It can also help build responsible channels through which relevant information may reach competent investigative bodies, provided that doing so does not endanger civilians or undermine humanitarian work.

The committee should move beyond condemnations and develop practical proposals built around prevention, documentation, and cooperation. Safe and predictable access

must remain the immediate priority. At the same time, credible documentation and effective national and international mechanisms are necessary so that deliberate obstruction does not become consequence-free. Food assistance must reach civilians according to need, and violations of international humanitarian law must be addressed through lawful, evidence-based processes. Food is not a privilege; it is a basic human right. No civilian should have to suffer from hunger because of conflict, politics, or decisions made by those in power. As an international community, we must remember that behind every blocked food delivery are real people waiting for help. Together, we have the responsibility to protect human dignity, ensure humanitarian aid reaches those in need, and make sure that no one is left behind.

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