

South African Food Sovereignty Campaign



Statement on Human Rights Day 2015: 20 Years of Democracy and the Human Right to Food of at least 14 million South Africans Remains Unmet

**Issued by the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign National Coordinating
Committee**

Section 27 of the South African Constitution states that all South Africans have the right to adequate food, and that the state should take adequate measures to ensure that this human right is met. But today as many as 14 million South Africans suffer from hunger. In addition, almost half of the population is food insecure. Only 46% of households have secure access to nutritious food every day – less than half of our population. While our Constitution remains a cause for celebration, this Human Rights Day, 21 March 2015, the material realities of unmet human rights in our country are no cause for celebration. The scandalous level of hunger is a stark reminder of the injustices of our society and the structural barriers that remain to realising the rights of our people that are embedded in the Constitution.

For us to take seriously the realities of hunger in South Africa and solutions, we have to interrogate the nature of our food system to understand why the Right to Food in South Africa remains unmet on such a vast scale. In essence, our food system is unjust, unsustainable, unsafe and contributes towards an unstable society. The food value chain in South Africa is tightly controlled by a small number of mainly corporate actors, whose aim is to profit off the production and processing of food. While some in South Africa access nutritious food from this system, many (up to half our population) either do not get enough food or when they do, are only able to access low-nutrient, high-fat and high-starch content food that the rationality of the food system presents as cheap and desirable. This results in malnutrition and the corrosion of human capacities, which is most dramatically illustrated by the fact that one in four children under the age of three years show signs of stunted physical growth and mental development due to chronic malnutrition. This affects mostly the children of poor, black families. We are therefore producing a stunted generation that simply will not reach their full human potential later in life, with significant social consequences.

As long as we have millions who suffer from hunger, we cannot say that we have fully realised democracy. Democracy should surely at least guarantee that a most basic right of

accessing sufficient nutritious food is realised. And when this is not the case, when widespread hunger persists, we will continue to experience social instability. We cannot ignore the fact that in xenophobic attacks on spaza shops, food is what is most often targeted by looters, with 'maize meal, bread, and cell phone airtime proving to be the favourites of the looters,' as one researcher found. The undermining of the human right to food is thus tightly connected to the undermining of other rights, driven by desperation.

South Africa is thus experiencing a food crisis, from multiple angles. But this is poorly understood in our public discourse and mainstream media. For example, a recent article in the Business Times (8 March 2015), titled 'Zuma stance may harvest a food crisis', presents the view of Deloitte's agribusiness head that a food crisis may be looming as a result of President Zuma's State of the Nation pronouncements on restricting foreign land ownership. This immediately begs the question: whose crisis? If we talk about the crisis of the poor and hungry, there is no 'looming' crisis; the crisis has long been here, with 14 million South Africans suffering from hunger. Is this not a crisis? Or is it only a crisis when big business and commercial farmers are the issue? The landless have long experienced a crisis, unable to access land for producing food for their families and markets. Is it only a crisis when the wealthy are restricted to owning no more than 12 000 hectares, let alone the far smaller sizes that the landless desire? The article also talks about the crisis already being faced by commercial farmers in South Africa. But it is not just the farmers themselves that are in crisis. They are a reflection of a food system this is in crisis. The drought currently being experienced in parts of the Free State, North-west and KwaZulu-Natal illustrates a growing trend of weather patterns from climate change that will only intensify into the future. Agriculture and food production already is and will be one of the sectors most heavily impacted by climate change. But industrial agriculture is also one of the biggest contributors to climate change through carbon dioxide and methane emissions throughout the production and transportation process.

The basic assumption of the article is therefore that our food security may be negatively impacted *some time in the future*. But South Africa currently is far from food secure: we repeat, 14 million South Africans experience hunger on a daily basis. Our food security is not a stake, it is yet to be achieved, if at all, as long as we fail to shift our understandings of the causes of hunger and the solutions. The media has a key role to play in this, based on the voices and views that it chooses to present.

Instead, we urgently need to re-think our food system and whether a few thousand large commercial farmers, a liberalised agricultural sector, and a corporate-controlled and concentrated food value chain is our best answer for feeding this nation. We need to imagine, articulate and build an alternative food system, one based on food sovereignty and the solidarity economy. Food sovereignty is about placing access to nutritious food as a key human right, and challenging and transforming structures of the food system and society as a basis for achieving that right. An alternative food system is possible, one based on localised production, social control over the means of production, land and agrarian reform and small scale farming, diversity, and ecological forms of production. The Right to Food can be met in

South Africa, but we need to radically transform our food system, with human need and equality at its centre. We need to reproduce and build an alternative food culture based on healthy, nutritious and locally grounded principles. We need to build the solidarity economy as a way of feeding our communities and grounding the control of a new food system in democratic ways.

We therefore have solutions, and these are being fought for and built on a daily basis. The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign was recently launched at an Assembly with over 50 organisations present, to advance a programme of action that challenges the existing injustices of the food system and advances alternatives. This coincides with the daily struggles of the landless and the marginalised to challenge the existing food system, such as the Rural Women's Assembly who will be launching a campaign 'We want land for food' on this Human Rights Day, 21 March. They will use the campaign to make the link between the right to food, land, women's right and human rights and dignity. We pledge our solidarity to this campaign and to the rural women who are fighting for a better world. Women, who produce most of the world's food and who are mostly responsible for ensuring that their families are fed, are at the centre of the struggle for food sovereignty.

The South African Food Sovereignty Campaign also pledges its solidarity and support to the weeklong campaign of localised actions being coordinated by the United Front(UF), the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa), the Right-to-Know (R2K) Campaign, Marikana Support Campaign, African Diaspora Forum (ADF) and Thembelihle Crisis Committee. We support its actions that are aimed at reclaiming our rights such as the freedom not to be detained without trial, freedom from all forms of violence, freedom from torture, freedom of expression, the right to human dignity, our rights to privacy and the right to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket and to present petitions.

Our struggles over these rights are bound together by the struggle for a better and more human society.

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