

# THE UN COMMITTEE ON WORLD FOOD SECURITY AND THE RIGHT TO FOOD

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR TRADE UNIONS

### What is ‘the right to food’?

From the origins of the modern labour movement, workers have organized to be free from hunger, demanding bread and freedom. That struggle continues today for what is recognized as ‘**the right to food**’.

In international human rights law, the right to food is the right of all human beings to adequate, safe and affordable nutrition. Like all human rights, it has implications for states. Governments are obliged to work for the realization of the right to food, by reducing and eliminating the many barriers which can obstruct citizens from realizing their right to food, but also through *positive measures* to *facilitate* effective access to the right to food.

The universal right of all human beings to **adequate, affordable** and **safe nutrition**, and the obligation of governments to ensure that that right is protected and fulfilled, was first formally recognized by the United Nations

in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in Article 25 as a part of the right to a decent standard of living. In 1966, Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), set out “**the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions**”, and “**the fundamental right to freedom from hunger and malnutrition**”.



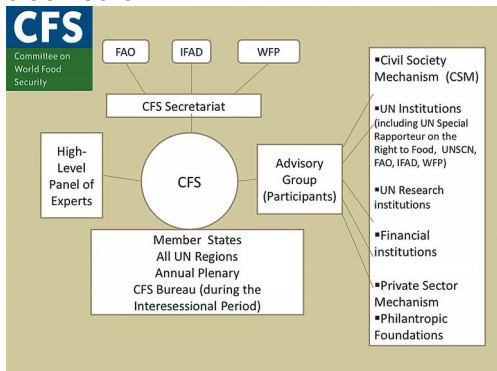
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While the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is legally binding on the 164 ratifying countries, which means that they are obliged to bring their domestic legislation into conformity with the Covenant's human rights standards, many signatory governments continue to dispute the existence of a right to food! This is why it

**CFS STRUCTURE:**



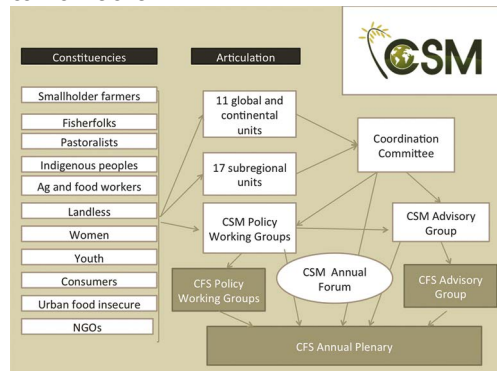
[www.fao.org/cfs](http://www.fao.org/cfs)

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has defined the right to food in these words:

“The right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensure a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear.”

is important that the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) reaffirmed the right to food as a universal human right in the context of reforming the intergovernmental CFS in 2009 following a sharp rise in global hunger and malnutrition.

**CSM STRUCTURE:**



[www.csm4cfs.org](http://www.csm4cfs.org)

“The CFS will strive for a world free from hunger where countries implement the voluntary guidelines for the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.”  
*source: CFS Reform Document, 2009*

**Rights are indivisible**



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A fundamental principle of human rights law is the indivisibility of rights; a violation of one right may affect access to all other rights. Denial of the right to food, for example, obviously affects access to health, or education, or livelihood, all of which are fundamental human rights. And vice-versa – rights are interconnected and indivisible.

inevitable about the geography of hunger: current global food production is sufficient to fulfill the right to food. The blockages are social and political. Food producers are hungry because of a systematic lack of bargaining power. **The right to food is inseparable from rights for food producers.**

For food workers in waged employment, this means effective access to freedom of association, the right of workers to form and join trade unions to negotiate with employers the terms and conditions of their employment. This, too is a fundamental human right, and is inseparable from the right to food. To realize their right to food, agricultural workers need to freely access their right to organize out of hunger, to fight for and to win **the right to a living wage and the right to participate in setting national and international policies to secure the right to food.**

Official estimates of world hunger put the number of chronically malnourished people in 2017 at around 800 million – nearly 13% of world population. Many millions of additional women, men and children are perilously close to the edge.

Over half of the world's hungry are food producers – waged agricultural workers or small producers. There is nothing



Discussing food security with GALU members in India. IUF photo.



The IUF is engaged with the UN Committee on World Food Security through the CFS Civil Society Mechanism. Through our involvement, we seek to

- Secure broad acceptance that freedom of association, decent work and living wages are key to policies for achieving the right to food at national and international level;
- Support our affiliates' fight for living wages for all agricultural and food workers, with special attention to raising the living and working conditions of agricultural workers;
- Extend the work of the CFS to national level programs involving IUF affiliates in developing government policies to advance the right to food.



CSM Forum meeting with FAO Director General. FAO photo.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE IUF'S WORK IN THE CFS AND HOW YOUR UNION CAN BECOME INVOLVED, CONTACT THE IUF:**

**email:** [iuf@iuf.org](mailto:iuf@iuf.org) **post:** Rampe du Pont-Rouge, 8, CH-1213, Petit-Lancy (Switzerland)

**phone:** + 41 22 793 22 33 **fax:** + 41 22 793 22 38

[www.iuf.org](http://www.iuf.org)