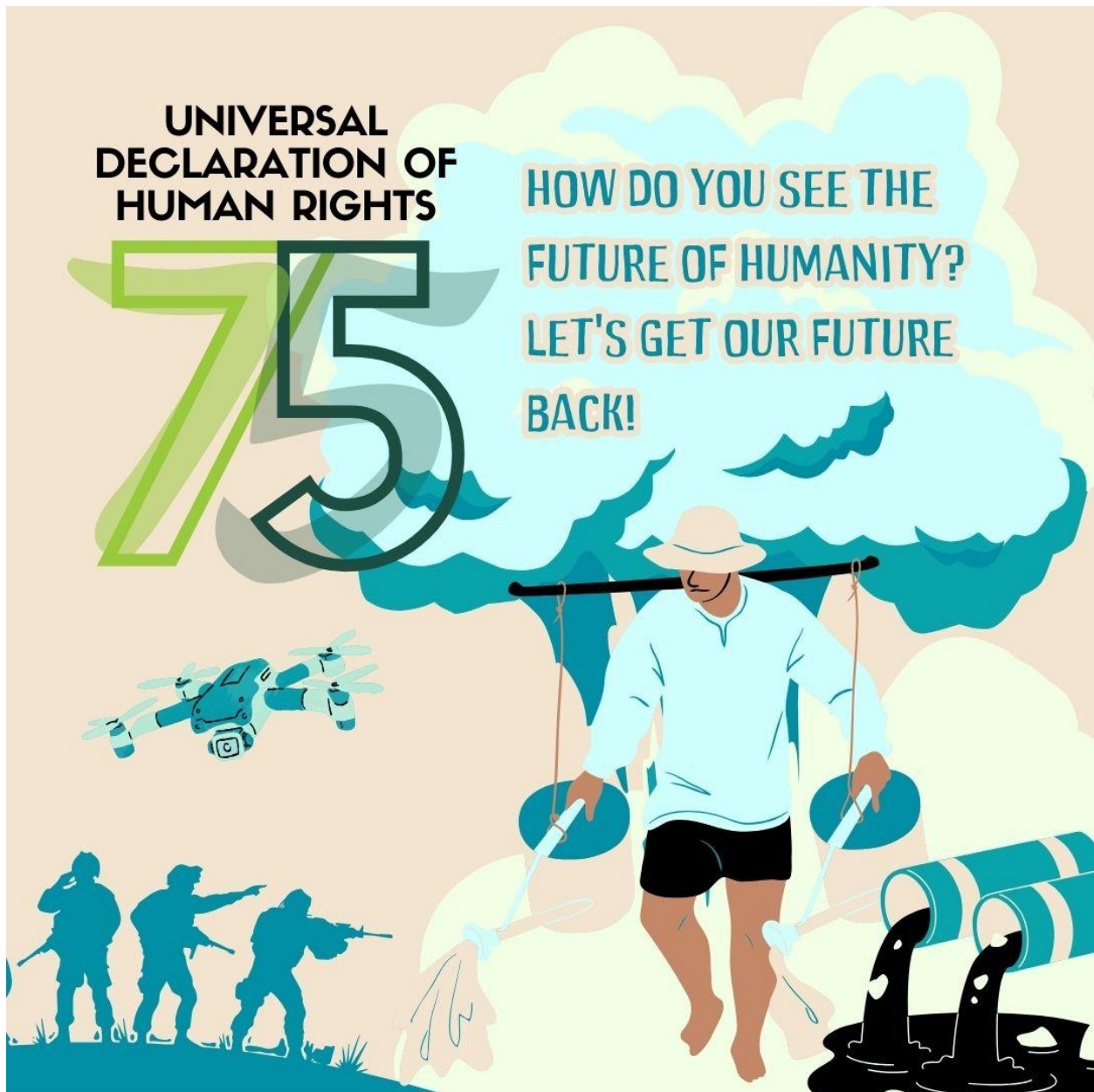




FIAN
INTERNATIONAL

BRIEFING PAPER

75 YEARS SINCE THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS: WHAT OUTLOOK FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS?



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a milestone in the evolution of respect for human rights. As we mark its anniversary, it is worth considering where we want the world to be in another 75 years' time.

The failure of the current global capitalist model to deliver peace, equality and a sustainable social, economic and ecological future is increasingly difficult to deny. And growing [hunger](#), [corporate capture](#) of food systems, [armed conflict](#) and ecological destruction will impact equally, if not more, on future generations unless we can change direction.

The recently adopted [Maastricht Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations](#) offer a roadmap towards a better future. They clarify how international law applies to the rights of future generations via a progressive interpretation of existing human rights standards. These legal principles were developed by human rights experts, Indigenous People, social movements and other civil society groups and were signed by almost 60 human rights former and current UN experts. They address intra and intergenerational injustice and acknowledge the interdependence of people and their ecosystems, the rights of nature, and the knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples, peasants and traditional communities.

This briefing paper takes three existential threats to humanity – hunger, armed conflict and ecological destruction – and examines them in the context of these principles.

HUNGER

Structural inequalities remain one the main root causes of hunger in the world today, alongside armed conflict and the corporate capture of food systems.

In Asia, home to half of the world's hungry and malnourished people, entrenched inequalities and discrimination, landlessness and low wages have been compounded by poorly implemented anti-poverty programs. In Africa, private financial institutions are now the largest creditors of foreign debt, limiting the ability of states to respond to the food crisis. [In Latin America and the Caribbean, hunger has increased by 30% in recent years. Rising food prices have affected livelihoods and access to healthy diets.](#)

During the COVID pandemic when states prioritized the protection of trade, the corporate hijack of global food governance was accelerated, exacerbating existing inequalities. High dependence on food imports increases vulnerability, especially for poor countries and peoples.

All over the world, transnational corporations are [dispossessing populations of their territories](#), [capturing native seeds](#) and [patenting digitized genetic sequences](#) of crops, which peasants have grown and passed down between generations for centuries. Unequal access to technology has further entrenched structural discrimination. Food production is becoming increasingly digitized. Corporations can control this digital information and use it to dispossess more peasant, rural and indigenous communities. In India, for example, the digitization of land records has [left Indigenous Peoples and rural communities landless overnight](#), with total disregard for their collective land tenure rights.

The food sovereignty movement proposes a different approach that supports local food systems and agroecology, based on human rights and public interest. [In Latin America, for instance, peasant](#)

[communities are recovering traditional agroecological practices and native seeds through solidarity initiatives. In Mali and Guinea, the protection of peasant seed systems and farmers' rights is being promoted by peasant movements. In Africa and Asia, some countries have defaulted on foreign debt to be able to address national food crises.](#) The European Union is introducing laws to make its food systems more resilient and fair.

Nonetheless, it is urgent to establish regulatory frameworks to curb the growing power of large corporations and their control over food systems. If we do not act now to protect the rights of small-scale food producer communities, support land struggles, democratize food systems and promote agroecology, in 75 years' time corporations will have gained total control over food value chains.

This will mean the loss of invaluable traditional and indigenous knowledge – including, for example, climate change adaptation. It may also mean eating food produced in laboratories by giant agribusinesses, that have genetically modified and patented the world's seeds – as well as commodifying water, land and even clean air. As a result, marginalized groups and communities would have less access to these common goods.

According to the Maastricht Principles, states must prevent and eliminate the structural causes of asymmetries and inequalities between and within countries. Not doing so would be considered a violation of the duty to eradicate intergenerational transmission of poverty, a major driver of hunger.

States are required to safeguard the right to land, traditional knowledge and seed systems, and ensure that peasant, rural and indigenous communities can participate equitably in the sharing of benefits derived from plant genetic resources – and in decisions that affect their rights today and the rights of future generations. They are also expected to hold corporations and other non-state actors legally responsible for violations that put people and the planet at risk. Those who fail to comply with these duties should be held accountable.

CONFLICT

War, systemic violence and structural inequality are connected. Powerful economic actors, states and corporations, use conflict and occupation to maintain their dominance over food systems, in many cases causing mass displacements of people. [Most undernourished people live in countries suffering from armed conflict.](#)

Hunger is used as a weapon of war. In many conflict zones – most recently in Gaza, Burkina Faso, Sudan and Ukraine – warring factions have paralyzed food systems, destroyed agricultural infrastructure and halted cultivation through mass displacements. However, community initiatives have also emerged from the devastation to feed people and develop plans for a more equitable future. In Gaza, for example, women's cooperatives have been producing food despite the historic blockade and have even continued as war waged on their doorsteps. In Burkina Faso, displaced communities have sought to make a living by recycling garbage. And in 2022, the Ukrainian Farmers' Forum presented a proposal for post-war agricultural reconstruction, based on small-scale producers.

If we do not act now to stop conflicts around the world, force states and other actors to respect international law, strengthen global peace movements and promote mutual respect regardless of race,

religion or ethnicity, in another 75 years' time we will witness even more mass displacements and acute hunger.

The Maastricht Principles affirm that states should prevent human rights violations, including regulating the activities of non-state actors under their jurisdiction. State violations encompass developing or using weapons of mass destruction, including inhumane conventional weapons and nuclear and biological weapons. The principles further require states to investigate and redress violations committed by non-state actors, including prosecution and reparations where appropriate.

ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION

Today the world is experiencing extreme weather conditions, global warming and the collapse of the biodiversity that sustains human life. In the face of this crisis, we see technological solutions being promoted above recycling and reducing waste, or the introduction of more stringent industrial pollution controls. In 2019, the [super-rich 1% \(77 million people\) were responsible for 16% of global carbon emissions, the same as the poorest 66% \(5 billion people\)](#).

False solutions such as conservation projects, often driven by greenwashing, too often end up in familiar neo-colonial patterns, pushing the most vulnerable people from the land they depend on for their livelihoods. For example, the Maasai people of Tanzania, who have protected their ecosystem for generations, are facing mass evictions and serious human rights violations, justified by the state in the name of nature conservation and eco-tourism.

Despite all this, our planet is resilient and humanity continues to evolve not only in negative directions. There is an abundance of agroecology and local food sovereignty initiatives which support and promote the use of traditional knowledge, passed down by generations of peasant, rural, fishing and indigenous communities.

Nonetheless, we must act now to end the use of fossil fuels and agrottoxics, as well as massive deforestation by agribusiness. We must take bold steps to reduce consumption and promote sustainable food systems. If we fail, in another 75 years' time, future generations will have to face the consequences of collapsing biodiversity and catastrophic climatic change. Severe droughts, floods and soaring temperatures would undermine their rights to food, housing, health, work and even life.

The Maastricht Principles recognize that humanity stems from the Earth and is totally dependent on it. During its lifetime, each generation is expected to act as a trustee for future generations. This trusteeship should be in harmony with all living beings and nature. States must impose restrictions on the unsustainable use of natural resources and the destruction of nature, guarantee its rights, learn from Indigenous Peoples and protect their territorial sovereignty and self-determination. They must also impose obligations on state and non-state actors to prevent damage and try to mitigate and remediate climate change and ecological destruction today.

Finally, the principles identify a range of violations of the rights of future generations including the depletion of natural resources, pollution of ecosystems, deterioration of biodiversity and attempts to discredit or bury evidence of the climate crisis.
