

From the 2016 Arria-formula meeting to a standing global early-warning architecture: Peace and Food Security under Graziano da Silva's term at FAO

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Introduction: from humanitarian response to a peace and security agenda

Food security and peace are mutually reinforcing. Conflict destroys crops, livestock, infrastructure, markets and institutions; displaces rural communities; interrupts trade and humanitarian access; and forces families to exhaust the assets on which recovery depends. Hunger, in turn, can deepen grievances, intensify competition over land, water and natural resources, accelerate displacement and weaken confidence in public institutions. The relationship is neither automatic nor linear: food insecurity does not inevitably cause war, and agricultural assistance alone cannot make peace. Yet food and agriculture policy can reduce conflict risks, protect civilians and create tangible “peace dividends” when it is conflict-sensitive, locally owned and connected to wider political processes.

This understanding has long informed the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), whose mandate reaches farmers, fishers, herders, foresters and others whose livelihoods depend on natural resources. In conflict settings, saving a harvest, vaccinating animals, restoring irrigation or reopening a market can be as urgent as delivering food. Such interventions help people remain on their land, preserve productive assets and avoid harmful coping strategies. In recovery, agriculture is often among the first sectors capable of generating employment, rebuilding trust and reconnecting territories.

Between 2014 and 2018, under the administration of José Graziano da Silva, FAO deliberately elevated this operational experience into a global policy agenda. The progression ran from advocacy on the hunger–conflict nexus, through evidence-building and engagement with the United Nations Security Council, to an institutional framework and a landmark Council resolution. Since then, the agenda has matured into recurrent global analysis, early warning, anticipatory action and programmes designed to strengthen agrifood systems in protracted crises. The trajectory is especially important today, when conflict remains the dominant driver of acute food insecurity in most of the world's gravest food crises.

Building the agenda, 2014–2015

A visible starting point came at the sixth Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in Bali in August 2014. Da Silva presented the relationship in memorable terms: hunger can lead to conflict, conflict exacerbates hunger, and neither lasting food security nor lasting peace can be achieved in isolation. The intervention located food and agriculture within a broader discussion of social cohesion and prevention, rather than treating them only as post-conflict relief concerns.

In January 2015, under Brazil's chairmanship, the UN Peacebuilding Commission held a special meeting on food security and peacebuilding. The discussion examined how restoring agriculture and rural livelihoods could support stabilization in post-conflict countries and called for stronger links between food-security programming and peacebuilding strategies.

This mattered institutionally: it brought FAO's field experience into a UN body explicitly responsible for helping countries sustain peace, while reinforcing the principle later embedded in the 2030 Agenda that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

The 2016 Arria-formula meeting: a decisive opening at the Security Council

The pivotal moment was the Security Council Arria-formula meeting on “Food Security, Nutrition and Peace”, held in New York on 29 March 2016 and co-hosted by Angola and Spain. Arria-formula meetings are informal, confidential or public gatherings convened by Council members to hear perspectives that

may not fit the Council's formal agenda. They are not formal meetings of the Security Council and do not produce negotiated decisions. Precisely because of that flexibility, however, they can introduce evidence, actors and concepts into Council deliberations before political consensus exists.

The 2016 meeting was FAO's first participation in this format and the first focused Council discussion linking food security, nutrition and peace. Director-General José Graziano da Silva briefed alongside Sakiko Fukuda-Parr of The New School and Sarah Cliffe of New York University's Center on International Cooperation. FAO's case was carefully framed. It did not claim that hunger mechanically produces conflict. Instead, it argued that the relationship is complex and context-specific; that conflict is a powerful cause of food insecurity; and that, under the right conditions, protecting food production and rural livelihoods can contribute to prevention, stability and sustainable peace.

The evidence presented was both global and practical. Conflict-affected protracted crises showed far higher levels of hunger than other developing contexts. Experiences in Angola, Nicaragua, Rwanda and Timor-Leste illustrated how peace and food security could reinforce one another, while crises in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Syria, Somalia and Yemen showed how destroyed livelihoods and blocked access could undermine stabilization. Agricultural support was therefore not a substitute for diplomacy, humanitarian protection or political settlement. It was a necessary complement: seeds, tools, veterinary care, water management, local institutions and functioning markets could help communities withstand shocks, remain economically active and experience an early dividend from peace.

The meeting's procedural legacy was also unusual. On 19 May 2016, Angola and Spain transmitted a summary to the Council President, which was issued as document S/2016/462. Publishing an Arria-formula summary as an official Security Council document was rare because these meetings are normally excluded from the Council's formal record. The document therefore gave unusual visibility and durability to a discussion on a subject that was not then listed among the matters of which the Council was formally seized.

Most importantly, the exchange produced an operational commitment: FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP) would provide Council members with periodic, country-specific analysis of food insecurity in conflict situations. That commitment moved the debate from general advocacy to an evidence-and-warning function. Joint FAO–WFP updates began informing Council members in 2017. They later evolved into the public, forward-looking Hunger Hotspots series, which identifies places where acute food insecurity is likely to deteriorate and recommends anticipatory action. In this sense, the Arria meeting created a bridge between technical food-security analysis and the Council's responsibility to prevent threats to peace and protect civilians.

The meeting also prepared the ground for later normative change. It established vocabulary—mutual reinforcement, resilience, livelihoods and prevention—that reappeared in FAO's 2018 peace framework and Security Council Resolution 2417. Its enduring significance lies not in having resolved the political disagreements surrounding hunger in war, but in changing what could credibly be discussed at the Council: agriculture was no longer peripheral to peace and security, and early warning on hunger could no longer be treated as merely humanitarian information.

From advocacy to institutional architecture, 2016–2018

The Arria-formula meeting was supported by a cluster of 2016 publications. FAO's technical note on peace, conflict and food security reviewed the evidence and emphasized that causal pathways vary by context. The companion publication, *Peace and Food Security: Investing in Resilience to Sustain Rural Livelihoods amid Conflict*, translated that evidence into an operational argument for protecting agriculture before, during and after conflict. A discussion note on food security and peace distilled the policy implications of the Arria exchange. Together, they supplied a disciplined analytical basis for an agenda that could otherwise have remained rhetorical.

FAO widened the coalition in May 2016 by convening the first meeting of Nobel Peace Laureates for Food Security and Peace. The initiative used moral authority and public advocacy to insist that hunger should neither ignite conflict nor become a weapon or consequence of war. At the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul the same month, FAO argued that humanitarian action must protect, save and rebuild agricultural livelihoods, particularly in protracted crises. Other engagements—from the UN General Assembly’s debate on peace and security to the Tokyo International Conference on African Development—helped place rural resilience within discussions of prevention and recovery.

In 2017, evidence and high-level engagement accelerated. The first Global Report on Food Crises created a consensus-based global picture of acute food insecurity, bringing together the European Union, FAO, WFP, FEWS NET, UNICEF and regional organizations. Visits by the heads of FAO and WFP to South Sudan and by FAO leadership to the Lake Chad Basin connected global advocacy with situations in which conflict, displacement, climate shocks and lost livelihoods were interacting. FAO and WHO briefed the Security Council on Yemen, demonstrating that conflict-induced hunger, disease and collapsing services required an integrated response. The 2017 edition of *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* identified conflict as a central factor behind the reversal of years of progress against hunger.

The Security Council’s August 2017 presidential statement on famine-threatened countries was an important political step. In March 2018, FAO launched its Corporate Framework to Support Sustainable Peace in the Context of Agenda 2030. The framework adopted a conflict-sensitive, three-part approach: mitigating conflict’s effects on lives and livelihoods; reducing and preventing conflict risks; and supporting transformative efforts that address root causes. It encouraged FAO to make its contribution to peace more deliberate, strategic and evidence-based while remaining within its technical mandate.

On 24 May 2018, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2417. The resolution formally recognized the link between armed conflict and conflict-induced food insecurity, condemned starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and the unlawful denial of humanitarian access, and requested swift reporting when conflict created a risk of famine or widespread food insecurity. It also recognized the importance of protecting objects indispensable to civilian survival, including food production and distribution systems. This was the clearest normative consolidation of the agenda developed since 2014—and of the opening created by the 2016 Arria meeting.

FAO then helped translate the humanitarian–development–peace nexus into partnerships. The 2018 Global Report on Food Crises found that 124 million people faced acute hunger in 2017 and that conflict was the principal driver in most affected countries. During the UN General Assembly, FAO, WFP and IFAD emphasized resilience, early response to early warning and coordinated action. FAO and the European Union launched a EUR 70 million partnership to strengthen resilience and address the conflict–hunger cycle. Joint leadership visits to Niger highlighted how water, pastoral livelihoods, local food systems and social cohesion could be addressed together.

From Council reporting to FAO–WFP Hunger Hotspots

One of the most tangible legacies of the 2016 process is the evolution of conflict-related food-security reporting. Beginning in 2017, FAO and WFP started to supply UN Security Council members with joint updates on countries affected by conflict. The work drew on FAO’s Global Information and Early Warning System, WFP analysis, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification and partners’ field knowledge. It gave diplomats a common evidentiary base on livelihood disruption, access constraints, market conditions and risks of famine.

In 2020, this approach developed into *Hunger Hotspots: FAO–WFP Early Warnings on Acute Food Insecurity*. Issued twice a year through the Global Network Against Food Crises, the series is explicitly forward-looking. It identifies countries and territories where acute food insecurity is likely to worsen during the outlook period, combines analysis of conflict, economic shocks and natural hazards, and sets out

priority actions. It complements the annual Global Report on Food Crises: the latter measures and explains the scale of recent acute food insecurity, while Hunger Hotspots asks where conditions are likely to deteriorate next and what should be done before catastrophe occurs.

The reporting chain does not guarantee action. Resolution 2417 has repeatedly supplied a basis for alerts and Council briefings, including on Gaza and Sudan, but political division, access restrictions and financing shortfalls continue to impede timely responses. The gap is no longer principally a lack of knowledge. The international system often knows where hunger is worsening; the decisive questions are whether warnings trigger diplomatic pressure, protected access and pre-arranged finance early enough.

Operational lessons and unfinished business

FAO's experience points to several lessons. First, food assistance and support to food production are complementary. Emergency agriculture is time-sensitive and can yield returns over an entire season: seeds delivered after planting time, or animal health services provided after herds collapse, cannot recover the lost opportunity. Second, conflict sensitivity is indispensable. Assistance must be designed around local power relations, land and water rights, displacement, gender and the risk that resources may be captured or aggravate tensions. Third, local institutions matter. Producer organizations, pastoral agreements, water committees, extension services and markets can serve as practical spaces for cooperation, but they should not be romanticized or burdened with political tasks they cannot perform.

Fourth, prevention requires linking early warning to early action. Hunger Hotspots, IPC analysis and the Global Report on Food Crises provide increasingly sophisticated evidence, but action depends on predictable finance, humanitarian access and political decisions. Anticipatory action—releasing funds and protecting livelihoods before forecast shocks fully materialize—should become a routine part of conflict-sensitive crisis management. Finally, accountability remains essential. Resilience programming cannot replace compliance with international humanitarian law, the prohibition of starvation as a method of warfare, protection of civilian objects and consequences for those who deliberately obstruct relief.

The central proposition remains as relevant in 2026 as it was a decade earlier. FAO is not a peacekeeping or mediation body, but its mandate reaches the material foundations on which peace must rest: land, water, food, work, livelihoods and functioning rural institutions. By protecting those foundations, FAO can reduce suffering, limit displacement, strengthen people's agency and support recovery. The journey from an informal Arria-formula discussion to Resolution 2417 and a standing global early-warning series shows how technical evidence can reshape international peace and security practice. The task now is to ensure that analysis produces action before hunger becomes famine—and that emergency response is connected to the long-term transformation required for inclusive, resilient and peaceful agrifood systems.

Selected opinion articles: arguments and current links

José Graziano da Silva's opinion articles formed an accessible public narrative around the institutional agenda. "Un nuevo camino al desarrollo" (2016) situated the newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals within a universal model in which ending hunger, reducing inequality, protecting the planet and building peaceful societies are inseparable. "Sow food security, harvest peace" (The Hill, 2016) argued that rural investment can help prevent conflict and sustain peace by protecting livelihoods and giving communities reasons and means to remain economically active.

"Hunger and conflicts walk hand in hand" (2016) explained the vicious cycle through contemporary crises and called for agriculture to become part of prevention and stabilization. "Time to plant seeds and cultivate peace in the Lake Chad Basin" (2017) applied that argument to a region where violence, displacement, environmental stress and collapsing rural livelihoods reinforced one another. "FAO will support Colombia

in making sure the new peace is kept” (2017) focused on implementation after a peace agreement: rural development, land, services and opportunities were presented as conditions for making peace tangible in neglected territories.

“Without seeds of hope, there can be no peace” (2018) stressed that maintaining food production during conflict preserves dignity, self-reliance and prospects for recovery. “El hambre es un crimen”, written with Nobel Peace Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (El País, 2018), framed hunger as a political and moral failure rather than an unavoidable scarcity. “Protecting livelihoods and safeguarding food security in conflict contexts” (Thomson Reuters Foundation, 2018) made the operational case for assisting agriculture alongside conventional humanitarian relief. Graziano da Silva’s message for the 2018 International Day of Peace brought the series together: peaceful and inclusive societies require that people are not left behind, and food security is both an outcome of peace and one of its foundations. Where original webpages have moved, the updated references below use stable FAO repository records, official UN documents or preserved publisher pages.

References

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- [FAO – Food Security and Peace: Discussion Note](#)
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- [UN Security Council Resolution 2417 \(2018\)](#)
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- [The Hill – Sow food security, harvest peace](#)
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- <https://www.fao.org/nobel-for-foodsecurity-peace/en>