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Population, food security, nutrition and  
sustainable development

### Statement submitted by the Hellenic Association of Political Scientists, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council<sup>1</sup>

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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<sup>1</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The globe arises as an ever-growing security complex with many countries around the world dealing with a series of security issues ranging from political instability and climate change to the great complexities introduced by the recent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context of global instability, enough attention should be paid on aspects of human security that determine mere survival such as food security.

Making use of its special consultative status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the Hellenic Association of Political Scientists submits the present statement on food insecurity as a well-established challenge, addressing the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Population and Development.

The adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in the first place, and the current operation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development came to mark the actual “humanization” of development by the international community. Going beyond a country’s Gross Domestic Product to also consider health and well-being as vital indicators of human and societal development put forward the notion of human security. Human security has advocated protection not only against violence and prominent threat but also against natural disasters, poverty and hunger. The fundamental meaning of human security is the ability of all people to access enough nutritious food to meet their dietary needs, in ways the environment can sustain into the future. As the global human population growth follows an expanding trend, states are faced with significant pressure to adequately respond to the increasing demand for food worldwide. The Hellenic Association of Political Scientists perceives food security as an essentially complex phenomenon given its vulnerability to a series of destabilizing factors that are frequently interrelated.

Firstly, greater food production requires access to productive land, water and energy resources. However, the diminishing availability of arable land, extensive soil and biodiversity degradation and frequent extreme weather phenomena have now indicated the critical nature of climate change. As stated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, climate change primarily manifests itself through its effects on the water cycle, namely through droughts, floods and unpredictable rainfall. Thus, climate change entails water change —due to shifting patterns of water supply and demand— which, in turn, creates a grim picture for the future of agricultural production and food security. Soil conversion affects agricultural production both quantitatively and qualitatively, altering the sort of crops and the size of yield that the ground will be able to support. Apprehension grows bigger when issues arising from problematic water management and inefficient hydro-diplomacy are considered.

The Hellenic Association of Political Scientists sees planning of agricultural development as being integrally connected to a holistic approach to water and land availability. Investment in food systems should be conducted responsibly and in such a way so as to strengthen the resilience of those most prone to food crises arising from climate change. While diversification of economies away from agriculture is adopted as a policy aiming to enhance the adaptive capacity of those countries vulnerable to food insecurity, the primary sector should not be left behind. Its role as a livelihood provider in many regions around the world stresses the need for the design of innovative and sustainable agriculture and food systems. Knowledge and innovation in combination with sustainable water management should be prioritized given their contribution to a climate-conscious transformation of food systems capable of responding to the increasing food demand. Research, external ideas and support

should interact with national and regional objectives and capacity when food and water development projects are implemented.

At the same time, climate change is only one of the many factors that affect food production. Food security can be deteriorated in the face of public health crises. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic came to add to the already complex setting raising concerns about possible effects on both the stability and the availability of food. Mobility restrictions that are still present in most states as a response strategy to the extensive spreading of the virus can be now seen as causing supply chain disruptions linked to interruptions in international and domestic transport.

Additionally, humanitarian crises, such as those deriving from armed conflict are also tightly connected to food insecurity. Experiencing conflict may directly impact on food security, paralyzing production systems such as agricultural assets. However, given that reversed causality arises in the relationship between violent conflict and food insecurity, emphasis should be also placed on the latter as a potential cause of conflict. Food insecurity does not necessarily lead to full-scale war, but it can easily function as a “threat multiplier”, especially in fragile and conflict-ridden areas. Land conflicts in northern Kenya provide evidence of how climatic variability and scarce resources may exacerbate existing grievances and in turn encourage the adoption of warring behavior due to the expected utility stemming from engaging in conflict. Poor management of food systems and little state response to the environmental constraints of fragile societies can therefore hinder peacebuilding. It is in this context that peacebuilding agendas should adopt a systemic approach to environmental, food and water resources issues. From a policy perspective, this should be encouraged on the bases of context-sensitive analysis addressing the key variables of each region and, thus, shedding light on when food insecurity provokes armed conflict.

Food insecurity is an already existing rather than emerging security threat. Building resilience for food and nutrition should inform global, local and regional approaches as a way of enhancing the ability to prevent, respond and adapt to human security shocks. Finally, situating food governance within the framework of international politics can cultivate understanding of how food security is significantly exposed to conflicting objectives, such as the prioritization of industrial food systems over agricultural ones and vice versa. This, in turn, can open space for productive cross-sectoral cooperation among local, national and international stakeholders with the purpose of working towards the fulfillment of the second Sustainable Development Goal on zero hunger.

The Hellenic Association of Political Scientists is grateful for having had the opportunity to express its views on the topic of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Population and Development.