

13th April 2022

H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat
Chairperson
Africa Union Commission
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Your Excellency,

Calls for urgent action from Africa Union member states on exacerbated food prices rises following Ukraine war.

First of all, we salute AU's swift response statement on 28th Feb 2022 to the reported blocks on African citizens trying to cross the Ukraine border: this unacceptable treatment is shockingly racist and in breach of international law. We also applaud the AU 2022 theme; "***Strengthening resilience in nutrition and food security on the Africa continent***" The theme is significant in addressing malnutrition and improving food security across the continent.

While recognizing the importance of the theme, as leaders of ActionAid programmes in over 19 countries across Africa, we are gravely concerned by the increases in food prices that had already reached record highs when the Ukraine conflict began and that are getting worse as each day passes.

The war in Ukraine is seriously disrupting the food supply chain. African countries are major trading partners with Russia and Ukraine for supplies of wheat, edible oils and fertilizer. Half of the grains distributed by the World Food Programme (WFP) through its food support programmes come from Ukraine and Russia.

The rising price of food is having a disproportionate impact on people living in poverty, particularly women and children. It is also so exacerbating existing humanitarian crises, such as the worsening climate-induced drought in the Horn of Africa where over 14 million people are facing severe hunger and water shortages. Cyclone Ida in Southern Africa countries affected 2.7 million people, who are not yet fully recovered. There are also millions of refugees and internally displaced people in the Horn and West Africa because of political unrest and conflicts. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, other humanitarian emergencies including those in Africa are not receiving enough economic, political and public support.

In addition there are now 100 million low-income urban people across the continent who are hard hit by the rising food prices, many of them women headed households. People across Africa are already grappling to cope with the economic fall out of the Covid 19 pandemic and this is placing women and girls at increased risk of gender-based violence and exploitation – as always happens at times of hunger.

1. We call on the African Union, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), East African Community (EAC), IGAD and other regional bodies to urgently take collective measures with member states to address the rising food prices
 - National governments must take policy measures to subsidize food accessibility to low-income people particularly women and children.
 - National governments must increase social protection safety nets and other measures to improve the income of people in urban and rural areas to cope with the increasing food prices
 - National governments must invest in building national and regional food reserves to act as buffers and reduce vulnerability to food shortages and price rises
 - Governments should scale-up support to smallholder farmers, especially women and sustainable agroecological approaches to farming, so farmers can improve soil fertility for crop production, without the use of expensive fossil-fuel chemical fertilizers.

- AU and member states need to accelerate climate justice as a continental and international priority - as climate change is expected to drive 122 million more people into poverty by 2030.
2. While addressing the immediate needs with urgency the above policies can only happen in medium term if African countries act collectively and united to get the necessary fiscal space to fund them. Thus, we appeal to the AU to collectively resist any pressures to impose austerity policies and cuts to public spending – which all too often are recommended by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in response to rising prices. In the face of the current conflict on Ukraine, the climate crisis and Covid, African countries need to invest more, not less, in gender responsive public services. Instead of austerity, governments must invest in ambitious and progressive tax reforms that pass the burden on those richest individuals and companies who are most able to pay.
 3. We also call on AU to engage and remind the EU, USAID, and all other donors and the wider public, of the importance of adequately supporting the humanitarian crises in our continent
 4. We call for a greater action by Africa Union to monitor the ill treatments of Africans in Ukraine and neighboring countries and engage with the EU to ensure the respect and fulfillment of peoples’ human rights including from racial discrimination and abuse.
 5. We also call on citizens across Africa and their institutions to ensure consumer rights through monitoring food, fuel and related prices and through acting against unscrupulous traders who take advantage of the disruptions in food supply chains.

ActionAid is a global federation that works closely with citizens, civil society organizations and social movements to empower people living in poverty and exclusion to fight for women’s rights, social justice and an end to poverty. At ActionAid, we support people use their own power to bring about real change for women, communities, and societies. We are present in 46 countries, 19 of which are in Africa, reaching thousands of communities.

Signed: Executive Directors and Country Directors of ActionAid programmes in Africa:

ActionAid Burundi	ActionAid Senegal
ActionAid DRC	ActionAid Sierra Leone
ActionAid Ethiopia	ActionAid Somaliland
ActionAid Ghana	ActionAid South Africa
ActionAid Kenya	ActionAid Tanzania
ActionAid Liberia	ActionAid The Gambia
ActionAid Malawi	ActionAid Uganda
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