



Okonjo-Iweala condemns Russia's withdrawal from Black Sea grain deal

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World Trade Organization Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala on Monday expressed disappointment at Russia's termination of the Black Sea Grain Initiative that has allowed Ukraine to export grain from its Black Sea ports for the past year.

"The abrupt termination of the implementation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative is a matter of grave concern," the director-general said in [a statement](#), adding that she shared "UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres's deep regret and disappointment."

"Global food security should not become a casualty of war," she said, stressing the importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation as global food, feed and fertilizer suppliers. "People in poor countries struggling with food and energy price inflation stand to be hit hardest by the termination of the initiative: prices for future delivery of wheat and corn are already rising. Therefore, I urge all parties to make every effort to come back to the negotiating table."

The initiative – initially brokered by the United Nations and Turkey last July – allowed for the safe passage of food and fertilizer exports from three key Black Sea ports to avert food shortages and stabilize prices. It had been extended several times but finally expired on June 17, after Russia threatened for months not to renew it.

Ukraine is a major producer of grains and oilseeds. Wheat prices soared to record highs in March 2022 following Russia's invasion, contributing to acute food insecurity that put people's lives or livelihoods at risk in 27 countries, according to [a May 2023 report](#) issued by the Food Security Information Network.

Russia's Foreign Ministry cited continued "provocations and attacks on Russian civilian and military sites" in the region and sustained international sanctions against Russian bank payments, insurance and logistic companies and imports as reasons for its exit. In [a statement issued on Monday](#), it also repeated the claim that Russian fertilizer and food trade were hampered by Western sanctions, although a [U.S. Agriculture Department report](#) recently showed Russian wheat exports at record highs.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called Russia's move "cynical" in [a tweet](#) on Monday, while the United Kingdom's foreign secretary, James Cleverly, [accused Russia](#) of "disregarding the needs of all those around the world." -- *Oliver Ward* (oward@iwpnews.com)

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