On 7th June 2012, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Mr. Olivier de Schutter, met with the members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and presented the findings from his report on healthy and adequate diets (A/HRC/19/59). The right to food is not simply a right not to starve, but a right to receive an adequate diet including a range of foods that contribute to a balanced diet and satisfy the needs of all people at their various stages in life. Mr. De Schutter also stressed the importance of acknowledging that human rights must be transnational, not limited to inside states but also across states. He is one of the authors of the Maastricht Principles on the Extraterritorial Obligations of States. The meeting, which took place after the initiative by IBFAN-GIFA, was chaired by Ms. Marta Mauras Perez, Vice-Chairperson of the CRC Committee.

**Combating Under- and Malnutrition with Breastfeeding**
Mr. De Schutter addressed the issues of under- and malnutrition, explaining how this affects immunity to diseases and normal psychological/physical development. He emphasized the importance of breastfeeding as the primary step in child development and the importance of supporting pregnant and lactating women. The 1000-day window between conception and the 2nd birthday of child is key for combating maternal and child malnutrition and for the development of the child, both physically and mentally. Proper nutrition during this time period will protect the child from illness and disease as well as lower the risk of becoming overweight or obese in their adult life. Nutritional diets for mothers need to be improved, and Mr. De Schutter explained that social protection programs are effective measures to improve the situations of mothers, reduce child mortality rates and fight poverty.

**Government Role**
Mr. De Schutter emphasized the importance of comprehensive country action plans that address the issue of nutrition and adequate diets. Such plans must focus on the broad-based view that links food and nutrition concerns with the long-term concern of sustainable local food systems that raise incomes of poor. This can occur by increasing the accountability level of governments and demanding that they fulfill their international human rights commitments. Courts, national human rights institutions, and civil society can play an important role in this regard if they are empowered to hold governments accountable and monitor their actions.

**Demand- rather than supply-driven interventions**
Many nutrition-related interventions are supply-driven rather than demand-driven because of the lack of community participation and therefore risk not being well adapted
to the context. For example, the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) initiative, which has the advantage of prioritizing nutrition at country level, could be further improved in this way. Mr. De Schutter emphasized that it is important to make sure initiatives on child nutrition are developed to strengthen rather than displace local agri-food systems, and that these initiatives provide income opportunities for those on the ground and respect traditional diets of different cultures.

The Code
Nutrition related interventions should not be seen separate from development plans and should be based on established human rights entitlements. One important example Mr. De Schutter used in this regard was the monitoring and implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast milk Substitutes (the Code). He emphasized that even though many countries have taken some kind of action to implement the Code nationally, “enforcement remains lacunary”. It is necessary for countries to implement legal instruments in order to fill this gap. Moreover, governments should require business companies to be aware of their human rights responsibilities. He suggested that companies who partner with governments in public-private partnerships should be the first ones to lead by example and commit to fully comply with Code. This would be in line with the recent WHO Resolution 65.6, which urges countries to develop or strengthen monitoring of breast milk substitutes and avoid conflicts of interests when partnerships are formed.

A Life-Cycle Approach
The Committee members had many comments and questions for the Special Rapporteur, and they were very interested in his report on nutrition in relation to their two General Comments: on the right of the child to the highest attainable standard of health and on child rights and business. One member brought up the idea that the right to food should vary for all aspects of and situations in life, such as during ill health, emergencies and crises. The Special Rapporteur responded by expressing his shared concern with focusing on the 1000-day window and forgetting about the rest of a person’s life. He reaffirmed the point that a life-course approach, as recommended by WHO, is important and that governments should not forget their duties to all ages of people.

Advertising: How the Media Shapes Food Practices
The Committee members also stated that feeding practices and how food is consumed are affected by the media and by advertisement and promotional activities by food companies. The Special Rapporteur acknowledged that there is an increasing variety of techniques that junk food companies are using to attract younger audiences, such as through the media, the television, by sponsoring events, by supporting schools and the marketing of “fun-foods”. While it is difficult to label food as ‘evil’ because it is a primary source of life, some types of food can be seen as analogues to tobacco because of the harm they cause to human health. The increasing rates of non-communicable diseases and of obesity, many of which are caused by inadequate diets, are causing life expectancy to decrease for the first time in certain countries. The effective monitoring of the Code
and monitoring of food promotion to young people are important measures that can contribute in controlling the effect of marketing and advertisement on child health. Mr. De Schutter reiterated his concern over a worrying trend with short-term interventions becoming replacements for sustaining food systems, and he insisted on the need to align short-term interventions with long-term sustainable strategies strengthening local food systems. He used the example of the distribution of infant formulas during emergency situations to respond to acute malnutrition, which has unfortunately created a dependency for mothers on infant formula as well as an opening for transnational corporations to market their products.

**Nutrition Education**
Promoting nutrition education and healthy eating practices is also an important strategy in order to teach children and parents about adequate and sustainable diets. Unhealthy diets are encouraged by cultural, social, and media norms, and marketed in manipulative ways so as to be desirable. The Special Rapporteur emphasized the importance of educating mothers about the benefits of breastfeeding and the dangers of using substitutes and supplementary food and the importance of school feeding programs as a tool to teach children and parents about adequate diets.

**Taxation of Soft Drinks**
Many Committee members remarked on the importance taxation of soft drinks and junk food and their removal from in and around schools. Referring to a certain study published in the *British Medical Journal* that confirms the conclusions of his report on that point, Mr. De Schutter suggested that these products are taxed across society and that the money collected by these taxes go to the distribution and production of adequate food for poor families so that they can eat nutritious. One of the main barriers in regulating the marketing and distribution of soft drinks is the intense lobbying by industry.

**New vs. Old**
Although issues of food security are not new problems for society, for the past 40 years, the focus has been on improving, expanding, and increasing production to provide a level of supply that matches increasing demand. But the emphasis on macronutrients and calorie-protein availability has led to a severe lack of essential micronutrients in diets. Today everyone understands that the view is narrow and that the right to food is not just about calories, but an adequate and nutritious diet matters as well. In order to ensure this human right, governments and transnational corporations should support, rather than risk undermining, local food systems : accountability based on the right to adequate food is key in ensuring this.