Farmland of millions of farmers endangered: UN official

08:17, October 22, 2010

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Millions of small-scale farmers are at risk as pressure on land for agriculture mounts at an unprecedented rate, said a new UN report issued here Thursday.

"Five hundred million small-scale farmers suffer from hunger partly because their right to land is under attack," said Olivier De Schutter, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, during his presentation of the report to the UN General Assembly.

Pressure on land boosted in recent years due to environmental degradation, industrial exploitations, large-scale land acquisitions by foreign investors and urbanization, according to the report of the special rapporteur on the right to food.

Each year up to 30 million hectares of farmland get lost, which poses "a direct threat to the right to food of rural populations," de Schutter said, noting that in this process "farmers are often relegated to soils that are arid, hilly or without irrigation."

According to the report, measures adopted for climate change mitigation or environmental conservation have also increased the pressure on agricultural land.

Particularly smallholders, indigenous peoples, herders and fishermans dependent on access to land and water for their livelihoods suffer, said De Schutter.

"States should confer legal security of tenure upon those persons, households and communities," he said.

Earlier evidence demonstrated that individual land titling and the creation of a market for land rights are not the most appropriate means to achieve this protection, according to De Schutter.

The report said the desire of a more equitable distribution of land with special potential for economic growth, empowerment of women and reduction of rural poverty.

Currently, many policymakers do not sense the urge of land redistribution due to technology-driven productivity improvements which is a less contentious alternative to agrarian reform, De Schutter said, noting that this is "a tragic mistake, given the threats posed today by large-scale land acquisitions."

"The best way to ensure land and the right to food is to democratize and to secure access to land for the benefit of smallholders," he said. "Land must be recognized as a critical human rights issue."

Source: Xinhua