Statement of Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS) on the de Schutter-WTO Debate

For Immediate Release
December 17, 2011

OWINFS Supports De Schutter: WTO has Negative Impact on Global Food Security!
We Demand Trade Rules that Support Food Security and Sovereignty

Another global food crisis has again highlighted our broken system of trade in food, which exposes farmers to floods of imports when prices are too low (often due to unfair export subsidies in rich countries) while at the same time expanding the ranks of humans suffering from hunger when food prices spike.

This volatility is a result of excessive speculation in the commodities markets, and global food rules – written largely to satisfy corporate agribusiness – that treat food as a product for corporate profit instead of a Human Right.

For this to be done, we have to promote local smallholder agro-ecological productions gathered to local needs and nutritional requirements. This also would ensure incomes for small scale farmers and help lift them out of poverty.

According with FAO last estimates more than 75% of food consumed in the world is produced by small scale farmers. The livelihood and food security of smallholders is closely linked as by producing food they also consume and automatically ensure their own food security.

The current WTO rules, together with IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies, are blocking this process by forcing developing and LDCs to lower agricultural trade barriers making them more reliant on imports from developed countries and exposing them to extreme price volatility of global food markets. This hurts both poor food producers and food consumers.

In this context we fully support the conclusions of Professor Olivier de Schutter, the UN Food Rapporteur on the Right to Food: that the WTO is adversely affecting food security and sovereignty of Southern countries and small scale producers and poor consumers in the North. The WTO Secretariat (Pascal Lamy and Clemens Boonekamp) underscores the multiple facilities given to developing countries to subsidize their farmers but ignores totally the lack of financial capacity of the poor DCS to benefit from these facilities. Olivier de Schutter demonstrated that the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) has devastated local agriculture and eroded food security and food sovereignty. This also applies to net food importing countries because their ability to grow their own food is destroyed making them even more dependent on big exporter countries and their corporations. This also justifies the power of agribusiness to take control over their natural resources including land, water, seeds and commodify the traditional systems of cultivation and biodiversity.

OWINFS believes that WTO is violating the right to food. We fully agree with Professor De Schutter when he states that “in the long term, poor net-food-importing countries will not be helped by being fed. They will be helped by being able to feed themselves.” There is increasing global consensus on this issue.

It is time for a fundamental transformation of the food system, and the following changes to the WTO are essential for a global system that would ensure food sovereignty and food security to develop:
• Priority and policy space has to be guaranteed to small scale farmers and their constituencies to ensure their right to protect their livelihoods and food sovereignty by being able to choose the best policies for themselves and their communities.

• Developing countries should have the right to raise tariffs and use other measures to protect farmers’ livelihoods, rural development, and food security. This ability, called the Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) in the WTO, must be far more flexible than is reflected in current WTO proposals for it to be useful in achieving food security. No additional commitments on Agriculture should be made of LDCs.

• Developing countries should be able to exempt products from any potential future tariff cuts as they deem necessary to protect farmers’ income, food security and rural development; the Special Products designation in the WTO must be expanded.

• We categorically reject any standstill on tariffs in agriculture.

• Export subsidies should be disciplined, including so-called “Green Box” subsidies.

• Trade rules must be modified to facilitate proper regulation of commodities to prevent excessive speculation and volatility in the global markets.

• Special attention should be paid to banning subsidies of agro-fuels, as they have diverted land away from food production and aggravated ecological degradation.

OWINFS is a global network of NGOs and social movements working for a sustainable, socially just, and democratic multilateral trading system.


####

For more information, contact: Ranja Sengupta, +41 (0) 76 644 2513