UN Expert Warns Of Global Public Health Disaster Caused By Unhealthy Foods

3/7/2012 2:04 AM ET

(RTNews) - An independent U.N. expert has warned that globalized food systems and the spread of Western lifestyles have spawned an international public health disaster with over a billion people suffering from undernourishment while another billion remain overweight or obese. "Our food systems create sick people," said Olivier De Schutter, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the right to food, while presenting his latest report to the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva.

"The right to food means not only access to an adequate quantity of food, but also the ability to have a balanced and nutritious diet," he said urging governments to uphold their responsibility in securing their citizens' right to healthy foods.

In his new report, De Schutter identified five priorities for putting nutrition back at the heart of food systems in both the developed and developing world. They are: taxing unhealthy products; regulating foods high in saturated fats, salt and sugar; cracking down on junk food advertising; overhauling "wrong-headed" agricultural subsidies making unhealthy ingredients cheaper than others; and supporting local food production.

"Urbanization, supermarketeization, and the global spread of Western lifestyles have shaken up traditional food habits. The result is a public health disaster," said the expert. "Governments have been focusing on increasing calorie availability, but they have often been indifferent to what kind of calories are on offer, at what prices, to whom they are accessible, and how they are marketed."

De Schutter pointed to the accessibility and abundance of highly-processed foods as a major factor in nutrition-related illnesses as they tend to be richer in saturated and trans-fatty acids, salt and sugars.

Consequently, children frequently become addicted to the junk foods targeted at them. Also, it is the poorest population groups in wealthy countries that are most affected by processed foods, which are often more affordable than healthy diets. He further noted that the export of such Western dietary habits had brought diabetes and heart disease to the developing world.

"We have deferred to food companies the responsibility for ensuring that a good nutritional balance emerges. Voluntary guidelines and piecemeal nutrition initiatives have failed to create a system with the right signals, and the odds remain stacked against the achievement of a healthy, balanced diet," said De Schutter.
"Ambitious, targeted nutrition strategies can work, but only if the food systems underpinning them are put right," according to him.

by RTT Staff Writer

For comments and feedback: editorial@rttnews.com
UN Expert Warns Of Global Public Health Disaster Caused By Unhealthy Foods

8/03/2012

http://www.rttnews.com/1835529/un-expert-warns-of-global-public-health-disaster-cau...