Cameroon: UN Expert Urges Cameroon to Step Up Measures to Ensure Food Security

A United Nations independent human rights expert today urged Cameroon to take measures to ensure it can have food security in the long-term, including investing in small farmers, increasing accountability, and implementing stricter tax laws for foreign companies that draw natural resources from the country.

“In Cameroon, food security indicators are on red alert despite measures taken in response to the 2008 food crisis and the increasing revenues drawn from the extensive use of its natural resources,” the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, said at the closing press conference of his official mission to the country, which began last Monday.

“Political will is not lacking in Cameroon. But it is doubtful whether the strategy in place for access to food is really tailored to the needs of poor populations,” he said.

In Cameroon’s Great North region, 81 per cent of rural households live in food insecurity, according to a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Crises, including those linked to climate conditions, occur every two to four years.

Mr. De Schutter stressed that Cameroon needs to shift away from short-term oriented solutions and focus on long-term investment in its population to ensure they can keep producing food.

“In Cameroon, 33 per cent of children are suffering from chronic malnutrition,” Mr. De Schutter said. “The majority of them come from families of smallholders, herders and fishers. And yet national efforts are primarily focused on developing large-scale plantations. Such plantations create jobs primarily for migrant workers who are willing to accept lower working conditions, and significantly fewer jobs than small-scale agriculture would yield if it were duly supported.”

Mr. De Schutter also urged the country to redistribute the revenues extracted from the country's natural resources so that they benefit local and marginalized populations, including indigenous groups and women.

In addition, he called on the Government to consider a stricter tax regime for the companies, primarily foreign-owned, who draw on natural resources and often avoid and evade tax in order to maximize profits taken out of the country.

“This strategy would allow a genuine social protection policy to be progressively funded, at a cost of roughly five per cent of gross national product and with significant multiplier effects. This goal is within Cameroon’s reach. It should be its priority from now on,” Mr. De Schutter said. He added that food insecurity must be addressed by strengthening responses aimed at helping small-holders and herders, as well as other vulnerable populations.

Independent experts, or special rapporteurs, are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. The positions are honorary and the experts are not United Nations staff, nor are they paid for their work.

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