UN supports India’s call for change in WTO rules for securing right to food

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The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food has said that developing countries should be granted the freedom to use food reserves for securing food for its poor.

UN Special Rapporteur says trade rules must be shaped around food security policies

New Delhi, Dec 2:
The United Nations has supported India’s calls for change in World Trade Organisation rules to help secure right to food for developing countries without the threat of sanctions.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, has said that developing countries should be granted the freedom to use food reserves for securing food for its poor.

“Trade rules must be shaped around the food security policies that developing countries need, rather than policies having to tiptoe around WTO rules. Supporting local food production is the first building block on the road to realising the right to food, and trade must complement local production, not justify its abandonment,” the UN expert said in an official release.

De Schutter’s comments made on Monday are important as trade ministers from WTO member countries will meet in Bali on December 3-6 to reach an agreement on proposals on food stocking by developing countries for food security.

India, as part of G-33, has already said that a short-term relief from legal sanctions against subsidy breach that is not linked to a permanent solution on the issue is not acceptable.

De Schutter warned that food security is at high risk when countries become overly dependent on global markets, as shown during the global food crisis of 2007-08. “They must develop ambitious and innovative food security policies that support their own production base, building on successful experiences in a growing number of countries,” he said.

Food reserves are a crucial tool, not just in humanitarian crises, but in the everyday struggle to provide stable income to farmers and to ensure a steady flow of affordable foodstuffs for poor consumers, many of whom lack a basic social safety net, he added.

The ‘Comprehensive Framework for Action’ of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, which includes the WTO Secretariat, called on countries to use strategic grain reserves to stabilise prices and to immediately review trade policy options and their impacts on poor consumers and farmers.

“The Bali package should now enshrine the rights of developing countries to use public food reserves for food security without facing sanctions,” he said.

India’s 2013 Food Security Bill mandates public procurement of foodstuffs in order to distribute subsidised grains to much of the population, combined with a minimum support price to ensure adequate incomes for farmers. This has raised concerns that India could breach the tight limits on ‘trade-distorting support’ applied to developing countries under current WTO rules, the release said.

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