Press Release

UN human rights food expert to G8: “Better, But Not Good Enough”

Geneva, 10 July 2008

GENEVA -- “Heads of State will have to do more if they want to help the billion human beings now suffering from hunger,” said the Special Rapporteur on Right to Food of the UN Human Rights Council, Olivier De Schutter, while welcoming the increase in agricultural aid and investment which should be confirmed today in the G8 meeting in L’Aquila.

“Structural measures must be taken now,” stressed the UN expert. “If the G8 does not succeed, then the G20 to be held in Pittsburg will have to tackle food price volatility, social protection, sustainability of production and the protection of agricultural worker rights. Only then will real progress be made to ensure greater enjoyment of the right to food now denied to so many.”

De Schutter believes that Heads of State are making progress, but argues that “there is still urgent homework for the world’s leaders – including over the summer - in tackling a food crisis that is far from over. Just like the collapse of large banks, widespread hunger makes the economic recovery less likely.”

“Increasing food security for the more vulnerable groups is not only a moral imperative and a binding obligation under international human rights law,” the Special Rapporteur reminded States, “but also makes economic sense as a priority in tackling the current crises”.

De Schutter welcomed the leadership shown by the United States, Spain and others to increase aid budgets for agriculture. He commended Japan for initiating reflection on the need for responsible investment in land.

De Schutter’s proposals – The Way Forward

De Schutter has argued that a global action plan on food security, firmly based on human rights, is urgently needed. “It should be considered for adoption at the G20 to be held in Pittsburg, if the G8 do not today address the full range of measures needed” he noted. The UN expert has identified the need for action in 5 crucial areas:

1) Reducing volatility in international agricultural markets. “There is a clear need for improving the management of grain stocks at global level, to limit speculation” argues the Special Rapporteur.

2) Encouraging States to build social protection schemes, including through a global reinsurance mechanism. De Schutter called for increased support to safety net programmes. “A global reinsurance mechanism would create an incentive for robust social protection programmes.”

3) Channelling resources to scale up sustainable agriculture systems rather than simply increasing food production. “The reinvestment in agriculture should be channeled towards public goods and sustainable farming approaches that benefit the most vulnerable groups and that are resilient to climate change. We can shape food systems that are productive, that create jobs and that are environmentally friendly.”

4) Protecting agricultural worker rights. “We need much better implementation of international labour law in rural areas” said De Schutter, who highlights the need to guarantee, to those working on farms,
a living wage as well as adequate working conditions. “That would be vital to ensure adequate access to food for those working in agriculture, who are a large part of the hungry.”

5) Reforming global governance for food and agriculture. “I am confident that more countries are ready to set time-bound targets to reduce hunger. A reformed Committee on World Food Security should provide adequate monitoring and guidance to improve international coordination.”

ENDS

Olivier De Schutter was appointed the Special Rapporteur on the right to food in May 2008 – at the peak of the global food crisis - by the United Nations Human Rights Council. He is independent from any government or organization. He teaches International Human Rights Law at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium).

For further details on the Special Rapporteur’s proposals, please see: http://www.unhchr.ch/huricane/huricane.nsf/view01/992973C0C0B7801AC12575E11004A5496?opendocument

For more information on the Special Rapporteur’s mandate and work, visit: www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index.htm

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