PRESS RELEASE

Political will needed to tackle food crisis and restructure agriculture," warns UN right to food expert

GENEVA 18 Sep 2009 -- The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Mr. Olivier De Schutter, argued that "there has not been enough structural change in response to the world food crisis," as he presented his second report on the emergency to the UN Human Rights Council.

Greater emphasis on right to food

"The right to food is not the right to be fed. It is the right to access the means to produce food or to obtain an income that enables the purchase of adequate food" said Mr De Schutter. "The international legal framework on the right to food provides operational tools and mechanisms to ensure that public policies are geared towards alleviating hunger and malnutrition and towards building the resilience of the most vulnerable groups against risks, shocks and policy changes."

"That is different and more effective than the outdated and misplaced emphasis on increasing food production", said the Special Rapporteur. "As in the case of the financial system, it is the responsibility of policy makers to take the decisions needed to ensure real change. Political will is needed to tackle the structural flaws in the global food system".

From Geneva to the G20 in Pittsburgh

At a press conference after his appearance before the Council, De Schutter called for the G20 meeting that will take place in Pittsburgh next week to follow up on the commitment to invest $20 billion in agriculture in poor countries. "G20 leaders must agree on a more ambitious policy agenda. For one billion hungry persons to escape poverty, the initiative announced at L'Aquila can only be a first step. It cannot be the last", warned De Schutter.

Despite some progress, the Special Rapporteur remains critical of insufficient international cooperation to address the root causes of hunger, including instability in international agricultural markets. "Nothing has been done to prevent renewed food price increases, while experts warn that climate change will result in more frequent and extreme volatility in international food markets".

De Schutter, who started his UN mandate in May 2008 – as food prices peaked - added that "increased investment in agriculture will not benefit small farmers without action to reduce market instability and create an enabling environment". He emphasized that "small farmers need access to land, credit, storage facilities, research and extension services, and communications as well as support to cooperatives".


PRESS RELEASE

The Way Forward

De Schutter emphasizes in his report to the Council the need for action in five areas in order to prevent hunger and ensure enjoyment of the right to food:

1) Reducing volatility in international agricultural markets. "There is a clear need to improve the management of grain stocks at global level, to limit speculation".

2) Encouraging States to build social protection schemes. "A global reinsurance mechanism would create an incentive for robust social protection programmes."

3) Scaling up sustainable agriculture. "Agro-ecological farming has demonstrated its potential, especially in the difficult environments where vulnerable groups live. We can shape food systems that are productive, create jobs and are environmentally friendly."

4) Protecting agricultural worker rights. "Farm workers must earn a living wage to get access to food; those working in agriculture are a large part of the hungry."

5) Reforming global governance for food and agriculture. "We need 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."

The food crisis is far from over. The FAO has confirmed that the total number of food insecure people is now above one billion people. Food prices on local markets remained higher in May 2009 than in May 2008 in more than forty developing countries, despite the price decreases on international markets.

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Olivier De Schutter was appointed the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food in 2008 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).

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For additional information on the Special Rapporteur’s mandate and work, please visit:
http://www.srfood.org/ or http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index.htm

Summary of the report on the global food crisis
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/docs/SRRTFSummarysecondfoodcrisisreport.pdf