UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food: “I urge the international donor community and the Government of Nicaragua to continue working towards the implementation of the right to food in the country”.

Geneva – In late 2009, the Presidency of the Republic of Nicaragua presented its new Strategy for Food Security, and the international community of donors has met with the Government of the country again following a suspension of meetings since February 2008. This is the context in which the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Mr. Olivier De Schutter, is today presenting the UN Human Rights Council with his report, based on the visit he made to Nicaragua from 6-12 September 2009.

In his report, the Special Rapporteur says he was “impressed by the level of commitment of the Government to realising the right to food” because “since the present Government took office a large number of measures have been adopted to improve the situation of the poorest segments of the population and to combat, in particular, child malnutrition and the extreme poverty of the indigenous population”.

Within this framework, the Special Rapporteur highlights the importance of the Law on Food and Nutritional Sovereignty and Security (Law No. 693 of 16 July 2009), which he considers a “major step forward towards the realisation of the right to food, and an opportunity to promote changes that lead to a process of agricultural development in which the incomes of small farmers improve and their activity becomes more sustainable for the environment”. The Special Rapporteur adds that the information system on food and nutritional security envisaged in this law needs to be improved “through the adoption of a standardised system of indicators, targets and references that will allow the monitoring of compliance of the State’s obligation to ensure the progressive realisation of the right to food”.

In his report, Mr. De Schutter analyses the programmes of the Government of Nicaragua in the field of food security from the perspective of human rights. In this sense, he claims that the support schemes under the “Hambre cero” (zero hunger) programme could be improved by “integrating the human rights principles related to non-discrimination, transparency, participation and accountability”. This would involve, among other things, “clearly identifying the beneficiaries in the legislation to ensure that any excluded individual or household could request the services of the programmes through suitable claims mechanisms”.

Mr. De Schutter expresses special concern about the land conflicts, “which have multiplied as a result of the country’s history”. In this sense, the Special Rapporteur also refers to the issue of forced eviction, which is reportedly happening in different parts of the country and in many cases has deprived peasant families of their means of food production. In relation to these issues, the Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government should adopt measures to “provide the maximum possible ownership security to occupants of homes and land” and speed up “the application of the titling
programme, to reduce the risk of more land conflicts occurring in the future, and giving priority to the issue of access to land of women”.

Another issue dealt with by the Special Rapporteur was access to adequate food for wage-earners. Mr. De Schutter expressed his concern about this and recommended that the Government “increase the basic wage so that it reflects the evolution of the consumer price index for basic products”.

Regarding the role of the international community, Mr. De Schutter says that it “should accept that its responsibility is not just limited to supporting the efforts being made in Nicaragua to improve food security, but it should also promote a form of development that is more inclusive and sustainable. This means, for example, not imposing conditions on commercial agreements that reduce the State’s resources even more”. Finally, Mr. De Schutter is pleased that the Government of Nicaragua has resumed meetings with the international community of donors and urges both parties to continue with their efforts towards the implementation of the right to food in the country.

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For more on the work of the Special Rapporteur, visit www.srfood.org or www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index.htm.

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Olivier De Schutter was appointed the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food in May 2008 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. He is independent from any government or organization.