"The New Committee on World Food Security meets its first test on World Food Day", says UN expert

GENEVA, 11 October 2010 – From 11 to 16 October, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) will hold its annual session at the FAO headquarters in Rome. This top-level meeting “will be a test for the ability of the reformed CFS to shape an international consensus on such delicate issues as land grabbing or speculation on agricultural commodities”, said Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, who is attending.

Among the topics to be raised, two will be particularly crucial, argues De Schutter: the discussion on the “Principles for responsible agricultural investments” developed by the World Bank and others to regulate large-scale land acquisitions (land-grabbing), and the initiatives to combat volatility of prices on food commodity markets, including a discussion on the role of financial speculation.

De Schutter will chair the policy roundtable on land investments, a difficult discussion as many have expressed skepticism about the ability of the Bank’s “Principles” to avoid negative impacts of large-scale land acquisitions on local communities and to channel investment into projects with the highest potential to reduce poverty.

The UN Special Rapporteur has been critical of the growth in large-scale land acquisitions, but will aim to forge a consensus. “In my view,” he notes, “the CFS should not ratify the principles as self-standing, but rather welcome the contribution they represent as one part of a much larger attempt to improve the responsible governance of land tenure and other natural resources. Where land is underutilized or considered vacant, the question of whether it should be redistributed to allow small independent farmers to use it should be asked first, before considering whether large-scale investment complies with a set of principles.”

De Schutter will also call for stronger action against financial speculation on commodity markets. His last briefing note, released three weeks ago, argues that the involvement of financial markets is responsible for a significant proportion of the increase in prices for essential food commodities and their volatility. That note also identifies possible solutions.

“The controversy around the necessary re-regulation of these markets has run for too long”, says De Schutter. “Unfortunately, the proposals currently on the table of the CFS remain too modest in comparison to the urgency of the issues considered. The background document for the session is almost silent on mechanisms to reduce volatility on commodity markets. We need to make progress on these points, and the CFS can play a decisive role in that regard.” Whether there will be much to celebrate on World Food Day, which is on October 16th, remains to be seen.

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Olivier De Schutter will be in Rome between 12 and 15 October and is available for interviews.

Contact

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Read also

- Contribution of Olivier De Schutter in advance of the 36th session of the CFS
- “Food Commodity Speculation and Food Price Crises”, Briefing note by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, September 2010.

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.

To learn more about the mandate and work of the Special Rapporteur, please visit: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index.htm and http://www.srfood.org.