“Madagascar’s hungry population is taken hostage,” denounces UN Special Rapporteur

ANTANANARIVO – “In Madagascar, one in two inhabitants is food insecure,” stated Mr. Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food. This proportion rises to 68% in the South of the country. The international sanctions imposed on the island and governmental inaction are aggravating the situation. “All food security indicators are in the red,” stated Mr. De Schutter, at a press conference this morning, closing his official mission to Madagascar, which began on 18 July.

“The result is that Madagascar today has one of the highest levels of child malnutrition in the world, with levels comparable to those of Afghanistan or Yemen,” the United Nations expert concluded.

Following the coup d’état that led to the formation of the High Transitional Authority on 17 March 2009 and the failure of various mediation efforts since then, Madagascar is being subjected to economic sanctions. “The decision to suspend Madagascar from the African Growth and Opportunities Act by the United States has cost at least 50,000 jobs in the textile sector, which had accounted for half of Madagascar’s exports,” noted the Special Rapporteur.

The European Union also has halted programmes that were ready to be signed before the political crisis, suspending all development aid channelled through the Government. “The total loss in expected aid is estimated to be about 600 million euros. Although humanitarian aid by donors channelled through NGOs has significantly increased, the nature of this assistance does not allow for a sustainable reduction of poverty levels.” The Special Rapporteur recalls that “circumventing the State means depriving it of its institutional capacity in the long term and mortgaging opportunities for development in the medium term. We are in the process of adding Madagascar to the list of fragile States.”

“It's high time now to reconsider the sanctions regime. With regard to the High Transitional Authority, it must not use these sanctions as a pretext for inaction to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe for its population.”

According to the Special Rapporteur, this double political deadlock has unfortunately affected two promising dynamics launched prior to the crisis: the development of high performance ecological agriculture and land reform aimed at securing access to land for the population.

“Madagascar has a unique potential for ecological agriculture,” he said. “We know that the system of intensive rice cultivation, a pure Malagasy invention, allows to double, triple or even quadruple yields. A national strategy to support this type of ecological production could make the large island self-sufficient in rice in three years, whereas it is currently importing annually 100,000 to 150,000 tons of rice. But for this to happen, the authorities must decide to act.”
“Similarly, the process of securing land titles also appears to have stalled,” continued the UN Special Rapporteur. Recalling the attempt by Daewoo Logistics to take possession of 1.3 million hectares in 2008, the Special Rapporteur noted, “Before the political crisis, investors eager to acquire the best lands of the island had entered a race against the process of titling of land plots of rural households. Today, investors are scarce, chilled by the political conflict, and the land certification process has slowed down. Started in 2006, the initiative still covers only 416 municipalities out of a total 1,550 due to a lack of resources. What used to be a race is now moving forward in slow motion.”

Closing his intervention, Olivier De Schutter expressed doubts about the fairness of certain fishing agreements: “fishing agreements that Madagascar has entered into with the European Union or with Asian companies are reminiscent of the treaties that colonial empires signed with their colonies in the 19th century,” said the UN expert.

“Legally or not, the seas are looted while fishing could be an engine of development for the island. The fact that industrial fleets come to fish without quotas, in the context of depleting marine resources, should be impermissible in the 21st century,” said the expert. “I call on the donors and international organizations to help Madagascar strengthen its surveillance capacity of its coasts and its negotiating capacity in order to develop a sustainable exploitation of the seas, to the benefit of its population. One cannot possibly monitor 1 million square kilometres with half a dozen ships.”

Read the end of mission preliminary conclusions (in French):

END

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.

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

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