

**PRESS RELEASE**

**UN General Assembly examines the right to food**

**in context of the global food crisis**

(New York,6 April) With the number of hungry people in the world now surpassing 1 billion, the UN General Assembly will hold a full day debate on 6 April on the global food crisis, calling specifically for solutions which take into account the human right to food.

“Any hungry person is a person whose right to food has been denied. This is unacceptable, since we, as global community, know the mechanisms, strategies and policies that could reverse the current situation,” stated the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, today in New York.

The latest numbers are appalling: 1 billion people are hungry and every six seconds a child dies of malnutrition. The global food crisis is far from being abated. On the contrary, price volatility and climate-related events will inevitably exacerbate the situation in 2009, with the poor hit hardest. This, compounded with the harmful effects of the global financial and economic crisis, will further challenge any remaining coping capacities of rural and urban households, stripping them of their livelihoods and means for survival.

The 1 billion hungry people mostly include women and children. The main factors behind their hunger are marginalization, poverty, landlessness, lack of decent work, and structural causes related to an unfair international trade system leading to under-investment in the agricultural sector over the past 30 years at the international and national level. This is why national solutions, grounded in the right to food, should be combined with international measures in support of sustainable development and recognition of the rights of individuals to be free from hunger, to have adequate access to food, and to an adequate standard of living.

Yet, the current policy prescriptions of producing more food or increasing aid volumes for agriculture will not in themselves alleviate hunger or ensure a life of dignity for the poor. At today’s General Assembly debate, which will likely be followed in November 2009 by an international summit on global food security, the UN Special Rapporteur will urge States to resist the temptation to return to business as usual.

“Business as usual means more food, and lower prices; but it also means unsustainable inequalities both between and within countries, with the impoverished countryside providing cheap food to the cities, and massive rural exodus as a result…Instead, a new system should be put in place, building on the ruins of the old”, insists the Expert.

The Special Rapporteur calls on the international community to take, in particular, five important steps towards establishing this new system:

1. to provide tools to support States in the design and implementation of national strategies for the realization of the right to food;

2. to assess the potential of the different models of agricultural development as regards their impact on the right to food, including their impacts on most vulnerable groups;

3. to redesign trade in order to ensure that it will serve development, as a condition for the full realization of the right to food;

4. to improve the situation of agricultural workers, particularly as regards their right to a living wage and social protection; and

5. to implement the necessary incentives or regulations to ensure that transnational agri-food companies contribute to the development of the countries they source their supplies from, and to the realization of the right to food.

The Madrid High-Level Meeting on Food Security for All, held on 26-27 January 2009 recognized the centrality of the right to food. The UN Secretary-General called for the inclusion of the right to food in the work of the High-Level Task Force on the global food crisis, “as a basis for analysis, action and accountability”.

*Mr. De Schutter was appointed Special Rapporteur in 2008 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. He is independent from any government or organization and serves in his individual capacity. The UN first decided to appoint a special rapporteur to examine questions relevant to the right to food in 2000. The mandate covers all countries. Mr. De Schutter has extensive experience in the human rights field. He is currently Professor of International Human Rights Law at the Catholic University of Louvain. For further information on the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, please visit the website: http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index.htm.* He can be reached at srfood@ohchr.org.

*More info on the Interactive Thematic Dialogue of the UN General Assembly is available on http://www.un.org/ga/president/63/interactive/globalfoodcrisis.shtml.*