

Press Release

8 March 2010

“Benin is at a key moment in the redefinition of its agricultural policies”, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food

GENEVA – “Increasing national agricultural production does not automatically lead to resolving food insecurity and reducing the number of hungry people. To reach this objective, i.e. to gradually realize the right of people to adequate food, it is necessary to put laws, policies, and long-term mechanisms in place”.

On Friday 5th March UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food Olivier De Schutter will present to the Human Rights Council the conclusions of his mission to Benin, the objective of which was to assess the the progressive realization of the right to food.

This report comes at a key moment, given that Benin is redefining its food security policies. Through PUASA (a programme of urgent support to food security), the Government of Benin foresaw the food price crisis of 2008 and started to drive agricultural production as a result. However, 972,000 people were still in a situation of food insecurity in 2009, representing 12% of homes in Benin. “Therefore, more needs to be done”, says the Special Rapporteur :

“It is necessary to continue the efforts begun in early 2008 to give a new stimulus to agricultural production, but orientating them more clearly in a direction that will lead to lasting results, in particular for the most vulnerable groups” says the Professor from the University of Louvain (Belgium), who knows Benin well after teaching at the University of Abomey-Calavi for 8 years.

The Special Rapporteur had carried out a mission to Benin in March 2009, invited by the Government. This mission was the first visit to Benin by someone with a special procedure mandate following the setting up of the institutions of the Human Rights Council in 2007.

The report contains about a dozen specific recommendations based on the right to food, a right that is clearly stated in international law on human rights. “I strongly urge the government of Benin to adopt a national food security strategy based on the right to food, along the lines of Brazil, and similar to how Mozambique is preparing to approach the issue», says Olivier De Schutter. He also highlights the fact that Benin has approved the Voluntary Guidelines on the right to food adopted by the member states of the FAO.

“I also see that Benin could support agroecology practices more actively – such as agroforestry and the use of tree legumes –, plus participative research to create systems that are productive and sustainable”, emphasises Olivier De Schutter. The report also points out that the creation of procedures for the purchase of crops at remunerative prices and on a transparent basis should be a priority, leading to an increase in crop storage capacity. These mechanisms remain insufficiently developed, but they play a key role in ensuring price stability.

The report evaluates the progress made and the essential points to be covered within the constitutional and legal framework of Benin in the area of the right to food, and also in the organisation of markets, access to credit, access to land, biofuels, social policies and international commercial relations. In March 2009 the Special Rapporteur met Ministers and senior officials from most of the sectors involved in agriculture and food, together with representatives from

NGOs, producers' organisations, researchers and UN system institutions. His recommendations are aimed at the authorities of Benin, local stakeholders and development partners in Benin.

The full report on the mission to Benin is available at http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?m=101.

ENDS

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

Press contacts: Olivier De Schutter Tel. +32.488.482004. Beatrice Quadranti (Tel: +41 22 917 9615 / email: bquadranti@ohchr.org) or Elaine Ryan (Tel: +41 22 917 9697 / email: eryan@ohchr.org) or write to srfood@ohchr.org.

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.