

Press Release

8 March 2010

“Brazil still a country of two tales: remarkable progress in the fight against hunger, amidst stark social inequalities”, according to UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food

GENEVA – “Despite remarkable progress, gaps in the right to food remains in Brazil” said the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, while presenting the findings of his mission to Brazil to the Human Rights Council.* De Schutter was in Brazil in October 2009 for a mission assessing the progress of the Brazilian State in the realization of the right to food.

“Stopping hunger in Brazil will require the consolidation of social policies, increased equality in land distribution, continued support to family farming, and a progressive tax reform”.

“President Lula has led the country into significant achievements in the fight against hunger, with concrete results –such as the 73% reduction in child malnutrition between 2002 and 2008– and the establishment of solid mechanisms: SISAN National Food and Nutrition Security System and participatory institutions such as CONSEA”, said De Schutter. He welcomed the increase in the minimum wage, which he said "was vital in expanding the domestic consumer market and enabling Brazil to resist to the 2008 global food crisis better than other countries."

He listed some important challenges ahead: “Food insecurity persists for 37.5% of Brazilian households, an unacceptable figure for a rich nation such as Brazil. 100 million hectares or 12% of the national territory, suffer from *grilagem*, a great injustice in Brazil. The land demarcation process for indigenous and quilombolas communities is moving at a very low pace and land concentration increases in some sugarcane-producing States such as São Paulo”.

According to De Schutter, there are as many reasons for praise than issues of serious concern. He expressed concern that some social movements that struggle for more equality are increasingly subjected to criminalization: “Sending out the police is not a substitute for improving the situation of the very poor”.

Arguing that choices of development models are vital, he said that “Brazil has bet on an export-led model, with the expansion of soya and ethanol from sugarcane as top priorities, nevertheless, the distributional effects of this model have yet to be assessed”. He encouraged Brazil to carry out this assessment in a comprehensive and participatory manner, but he doubted that the benefits of global trade of agricultural commodities have ‘trickled down’ to the food-insecure groups such as daily rural workers, the landless or the urban poor.

Despite significant efforts of the Brazilian government to promote family farming, the export-led, large scale model still captures a disproportionate level of public support. Around 47,000 large properties – just 1% of the farms – cover 43% of the land while contributing sometimes little to employment, yet they enjoy priority funding in federal agricultural credit. On the other hand, family agriculture produces 38% of the total value of agricultural production, creates more jobs and is more productive per hectare. Family farming, has been neglected for decades, said De Schutter, adding that “the potential in improving food security through continued support to family farming is huge.”,

He commended the Minister of Agrarian Development for the June 2009 law organizing the procurement of a minimum of 30% of school feeding (PNAE) from assentamentos and family farming. “This is actually one of the best levers the Brazilian government has at its disposal to realize the right to food for all. The world is watching this programme, it cannot fail”.

The report includes a set of recommendations to the Brazilian State, which are coherent with the recent vote by the Brazilian Congress of an amendment to the Constitution which makes the right to food a constitutional right, a vote that the UN Special Rapporteur warmly welcomed.

“The Fome Zero programmes should be enshrined into laws, with adequate earmarked budget, so that they cannot easily be reversed, creating a permanent dynamic of progress and development”, said the Prof De Schutter.

“Brazil should also consider stepping at full speed into the best sustainable farming approaches in order to become a holistic and long-term source of inspiration for the world. Indeed, there is a huge untapped potential in innovative agroecological practices, and they could be scaled up.”, said the UN expert, calling for a nation-wide participatory assessment of the respective merits of family farming, agroecology and export-led agriculture, including monocultures and agrofuels.

Recommendations also include the strengthening of the Federal Public Ministry capacity for a proactive use of constitutional guarantees, a broader redistribution of land to the landless, and a shift in the collection of tax and in the use of public resources, which is a key priority for De Schutter. He highlights the fact that the regressive nature of the Brazilian tax system is a major impediment to raise sufficient resources to tackle hunger problems in Brazil. It also restricts the income available to poor families to feed themselves appropriately. De Schutter also supports the proposition that the Pre-Salt Social Fund should include the right to food among its objectives, as the Zero Hunger programme represents only 1% of the national budget.

“The right to food is achievable in Brazil, yet it requires looking towards the future rather than holding to conservationist views. My report tries to identify the best options for the 2010-2015 period, some that are already planned by the government, others that are not”, said De Schutter. “The example of Brazil shows that with political will, tremendous progress can be achieved – but stark inequalities remain and more should be done to combat them”.

** **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.*

He met with more than one hundred persons during his mission (October 12-18, 2009), including Ministers Celso Amorim, Patrus Ananias, and Guilherme Cassel; the Presidents of both Houses of Congress Mr Jose Sarney and Mr Michel Temer, as well as representatives of all food security institutions, in particular CONSEA and CAISAN, and a broad and representative sample of civil society organizations.

Read the report “Mission to Brazil” on http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?m=101.

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

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