

Press Release

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Guatemala: “More needs to be done to remove obstacles to the right to food”, urges a UN expert

GENEVA – “Inequality in Guatemala reaches intolerable levels and the number of poor people is unacceptable”, warns Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur for the right to food. “50.9% of the population live below the poverty threshold and 15.2% live in extreme poverty. All this leads to extremely high levels of malnutrition that affect 16% of the population”.

These figures are part of the report* Mr. De Schutter will present tomorrow to the Human Rights Council on his official mission to Guatemala from 3-5 September 2009. The aim of the visit was to evaluate compliance with the recommendations made by the previous Rapporteur in 2005 and to examine the current situation regarding the exercise of the right to food in Guatemala.

In his report, the Special Rapporteur expresses his satisfaction for the level of commitment and the range of efforts by the Government of Guatemala to improve the food security situation in the country. Nevertheless, he concludes that more needs to be done to remove the structural obstacles that stand in the way of the full exercise of the right to food, particularly in the case of indigenous peoples.

In this regard, the Special Rapporteur advises the Government of Guatemala to significantly increase social expenditure with a view to promoting rural development and agricultural services, and to finance access to the land for landless rural workers.

“The inequalities present in access to the land are also considerable and require the adoption of policies aimed at limiting the existing excessive concentration, the Policy on Integral Rural Development needs to be made Law, and there should be protection for indigenous communities against eviction from the land they use for their subsistence”, says the Special Rapporteur.

Mr. De Schutter recommends that Government of Guatemala should integrate principles of human rights in existing social programmes, increase the minimum wage and strengthen the powers of the Labour Inspectorate. He also recommends strengthening the Information and Communication System on Food and Nutritional Security and reforms to the taxation system, particularly through a modification to the solidarity tax and an increase in income tax for higher incomes.

Finally, the Special Rapporteur indicates that legal protection of the right to food continues to be insufficient. “Despite having the tools to do so, neither the Constitutional Court nor ordinary courts protect the right to food against violations”. For De Schutter, “the empowerment and supervision of the courts can be a particularly efficient way to combat the risk of corruption when it comes to putting programmes to fight hunger and poverty into practice”.

* **The complete version of the mission report** on Guatemala is available at:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/13session/reports.htm>.

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

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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.