



OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

WORLD SUMMIT ON FOOD SECURITY
(Rome, 16 to 18 November 2009)

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Statement by

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Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for inviting me to this World Summit on Food Security. Allow me to express my appreciation to the organizers of the Summit, especially our colleagues from FAO, as well as all participants for their continuous efforts to respond to the global food crisis and to ensure sustainable food and nutrition security for all.

The United Nations human rights mechanisms have been part of these efforts. On May 2008, the Human Rights Council held a special session on the global food crisis during which States underscored the need to place the protection of human rights at the very centre of the responses to the crisis. Since then, the Council has been regularly following up the issue. The Special Rapporteur on the right to food, appointed by the Council, Mr. Olivier De Schutter, has been energetically providing analysis and guidance on the food crisis and human rights. The United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights has worked closely with the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis since its inception, and has joined the Task Force as a full member in February this year.

As emphasized by the Secretary-General at the High-Level Meeting on "Food Security for All", held in Madrid in January 2009, the right to food serves as a basis for analysis, action and accountability of the responses to the food crisis and of efforts to eradicate hunger. The right to food should be fully integrated into both emergency assistance and in efforts to achieve sustainable food and nutrition security for all. I therefore welcome the inclusion of the right to food in the Declaration and within the Principles for Sustainable Global Food Security

adopted in this summit, and the repeated mentions made by several distinguished delegates.

The right to food means that every woman, man and child has a right to access, at all times, to affordable and adequate food or means for its procurement. Hunger persists not because of the lack of food in the world, but because of obstacles that undermine people's access to food and means to obtain food, such as the lack of access to decent income, of production opportunities and of effective social security. A right to food framework examines and confronts these deeply rooted obstacles that are often caused by discrimination and exclusion, lack of participation and accountability. The right to food also requires States, individually and collectively, to take measures to ensure longer-term food and nutrition security, through equitable distribution of food in the world and sustainable development and use of resources. Human rights principles recognize those who are food insecure and marginalized, including women, indigenous peoples and small-scale food producers, as active agents for solving the problem, and not merely as objects of assistance.

As highlighted by the Human Rights Council, the right to food requires concrete actions, such as the mapping of the food insecure, the adoption of legislation and policies with a right to food framework, the establishment of accountability mechanisms to enable rights-holders to claim their rights, and the participation of rights-holders, particularly the most vulnerable, in the design and monitoring of relevant legislation and policies.¹

The full realization of the right to food and freedom from hunger may need to be achieved progressively. However, at the same time, States have responsibilities

¹ HRC resolution (A/HRC/RES/12/10) “3. *Encourages* States to mainstream the human rights perspective in building and reviewing their national strategies for the realization of the right to adequate food for all, which could include, inter alia, the mapping of the food insecure, the adoption of relevant legislation and policies with a right to food framework, the establishment of mechanisms to ensure accountability so that rights-holders are able to claim their right to food, and the establishment of mechanisms and processes that ensure the participation of rights-holders, particularly the most vulnerable, in the design and monitoring of such legislation and policies;”

to take immediate action to move forward towards better realization of these rights, to prohibit discrimination in the enjoyment of these rights and to ensure the satisfaction of, at the very least, the minimum essential levels required to be free from hunger.²

Excellencies,

Under human rights law, including through the Universal Declaration of Human and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States have a responsibility to confront hunger, individually and collectively, in ways that respect human rights without discrimination. In 2006, Member States of the FAO unanimously adopted the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food³ which reflect existing human rights standards and provide practical guidance to States on how to implement the right to adequate food. The Guidelines are increasingly perceived as essential tools for the development of national laws and policies. International human rights law and FAO's Voluntary Guidelines should be given a vital role in guiding national and international efforts to eradicate hunger and to assure sustainable food and nutrition security for all, for today, tomorrow and in future. I welcome the recognition of such a role of the Voluntary Guidelines made in the Declaration adopted in this Summit. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stands ready to support Member States and its United Nations system partners in these endeavours.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to underscore the crucial contribution human rights can make to our efforts by rendering solutions more sustainable and equitable. Thank you for inviting the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to convey this message to this important gathering.

² CESCR General Comment No. 12

³ Full title: "Voluntary guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security."

Thank you for your attention.