

Statement by Martin Wolpold-Bosien, FIAN International

On the Future of the Right to Food Work at FAO

We, civil society groups of several countries participating in the Right to Food Forum who have been promoting and defending the Human Right to Food on the local, national, regional and international level, are concerned about the future of the Right to Food work at FAO.

We consider that FAO's proactive role in developing global consensus and global policy coherence was demonstrated by the Council's unanimous adoption, in 2004, of the Right to Food Guidelines (Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Food in the Context of National Food Security). The unprecedented worldwide mobilization around the theme of the World Food Day 2007 further confirmed the organization's convening power and its advocacy role on behalf of the hungry.

FAO has been supporting member countries in the implementation of the Right to Food Guidelines since 2006. The number of countries asking for technical expertise, policy advice and capacity development on the right to food has considerably increased, evidencing the comparative advantage FAO has in this area. FAO is the forefront of the conceptual thinking on the right to food and the most important agency capable of providing practical support for right to food implementation at country level. FAO has also been a leader on the promotion of the right to food, through the achievement of the World Food Summit commitments and the Millennium Development Goals on hunger.

Progress in reducing hunger has been too slow because the root causes of hunger have not been addressed sufficiently. The right to food tackles the social and political dimensions of the hunger problem. By promoting non-discrimination, empowerment, participation and the rule of law, it completes and strengthens the technical work FAO is already undertaking, for example in food security, forestry, emergency, and other relevant areas. The right to food approach is a contribution to increased efficiency, accountability and sustainability of efforts to eradicate hunger.

The right to food was recognized as a priority area for FAO (see report of the FAO conference 2007, para. 47). It is a strategic priority, as it complements and reinforces the work undertaken by the Organization in all its areas of activities.

We highly appreciate the impressive work which has been done by the Right to Food Unit to support the implementation of the Right to Food Guidelines. This Right to Food Forum has shown again that the Right to Food Unit has a leadership role in advancing normative and methodological tools, technical assistance to Member States, networking and outreach.

We are concerned about the future of the Right to Food Unit and of its work. There is a high degree of uncertainty in relation to the resources needed for the follow-up of the work in 2009. If the majority of the FAO Member States is committed to promoting the Right to Food as a priority of the institution, resources are needed to secure the future work on the Right to Food. A discontinuation of the work of the Right to Food Unit will seriously undermine the sustainability of the processes initiated in a number of countries under the advice of the Unit, such as the ongoing drafting of legislation, capacity-building of public servants and civil

society organizations engaged in the full realization and monitoring of the implementation of the right to food. Moreover, the technical tools already developed and published by the Unit will not be applied properly if FAO is unable to guide their implementation.

We are aware that the FAO Reform process has achieved a preliminary agreement about defining the right to food as an Organizational Result within the strategic framework of global goals, strategic objectives and organizational results of the FAO. We consider this is the absolute minimum. However, we stress that it would have been much more appropriate to define the Right to Food as one of the Strategic Objectives of the FAO.

In the current context of the global food crisis and the moment where the right to food has gained unprecedented attention of the international human rights bodies, it would be unfortunate to see the FAO losing its leadership on the subject by failing to make the right to food a priority of the organization.

The Future of the FAO's Right to Food Work

Based on the considerations above, the capacity of FAO to work in the implementation of the Right to Food Guidelines must be strengthened within the process of the FAO reform.

We suggest and demand in this regard:

- 1) The realization of the right to food as an organizational result should be appropriately institutionalized in the FAO work, through establishing and maintaining a right to food focal point in order to facilitate the integration of the right to food into the work of all relevant FAO areas.
- 2) A minimum of regular budget resources must be allocated to FAO's Right to Food efforts in order to ensure the continuity of the work of the Right to Food Unit in 2009, and a substantive increase should be incorporated in the 2010-2011 biannual budget. In addition, Member States should consider to contribute with extra-budgetary funds to an enforced functioning of the Right to Food work at FAO.

In order to ensure that the findings of the Right to Food Forum are adequately taken into account in the FAO institutional proceedings, and that appropriate action is taken, we urge Member States and FAO's Secretariat to report the conclusions of the Forum to the 34th Session of the Committee on World Food Security.