

"WHEN HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION PERSIST, THERE CAN BE NO JUSTICE OR SECURITY", SAYS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

15 October 2007

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, **Louise Arbour**, issued the following statement on the occasion of World Food Day to be celebrated on 16 October 2007.

"Where hunger and malnutrition persist, there can be no justice or security. A just and secure world is one where every woman and man - every girl and boy - can live in dignity, without wondering where the next meal will come from.

According to FAO, the world has sufficient resources to feed its entire population. Yet the number of people who go to bed hungry every night continues to increase. It does so despite repeated political pledges to end hunger and malnutrition, despite the commitment of all UN Member States to achieve the first Millennium Development Goal, to "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger".

Ensuring access to adequate food and preventing hunger is not only a development issue, it is also a human rights imperative. The human right to adequate food is recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in many of the international human rights treaties which every State has ratified. It will be realized when everyone has, at all times, access – physical and economic – to adequate food or to the means to obtain it. It has been described as the right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access to food - or the means to acquire it – which is sufficient, respects cultural traditions and ensures a fulfilling and dignified life, free of fear.

Recognising the human right to food imposes an obligation on States to respect, protect and facilitate - and when necessary provide - access to food. Thus, States must do nothing that interferes with the ability to obtain food and must ensure business enterprises or individuals do not deprive others of such access. States must also engage in efforts to strengthen everyone's ability to obtain adequate food, including by promoting food security. Indeed, when specific individuals or groups cannot, for reasons beyond their control, enjoy the right by the means at their disposal, States must make every effort to provide them directly with adequate food or resources to get it.

Human rights are indivisible: enjoyment of the right to food is essential to the enjoyment of all human rights. Freedom from torture and slavery, or the right to express ideas, are not meaningful to those starving or suffering from chronic malnutrition, nor can the rights to education or health be enjoyed without adequate food. Likewise, the right to food cannot be enjoyed where other human rights are violated – for example, where discrimination flourishes or where the right to work, to participate in public affairs, or to enjoy the equal protection of the law is denied.

Adopting a comprehensive human rights-based approach to food security helps find sustainable and equitable pathways out of hunger and malnutrition. A human rights approach requires ensuring that policy priorities reflect human rights concerns and emphasize the needs of the most disadvantaged. It also requires priorities to be defined through inclusive democratic processes. It empowers people to hold their governments accountable and to become participants in the process of human development, rather than being passive recipients. The Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to

Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security seek to reflect existing human rights standards and provide useful guidance to States and those supporting their efforts. Progress must be made in implementing them, within a strategy that promotes greater enjoyment of all human rights.

Though we increasingly understand the human rights obligations of States, the full realization of the right to food for all remains a distant goal. It is now time for deeds, rather than words: we must act now to make the right to food a reality".