

UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON RIGHT TO FOOD DEPLORES INCREASE IN NUMBER OF PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM HUNGER

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The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, **Jean Ziegler**, issued the following statement on the occasion of this year's World Food Day which is celebrated today:

"Today I am unable to report a reduction in the number of persons suffering from violations of the right to food. On the contrary, despite real advances realised in different countries, the number of people suffering from hunger has increased every year since 1996. This number has now reached an estimated 854 million people, despite Government commitments at the 2002 World Food Summit and at the 2000 Millennium Summit to eradicate hunger. Every five seconds, a child below ten dies from hunger and malnutrition-related diseases.

Yet hunger and famine are not inevitable. According to the FAO, the world already produces enough food to feed every child, woman and man and could feed 12 billion people, double the current world population. Our world is richer than ever before, so how can we accept that 6 million children under five are killed every year by malnutrition and related illnesses?

All human beings have the right to live in dignity, free from hunger.

Today is not the moment to look back, but to look forward as there is so much work still to be done in promoting and protecting the right to adequate food. Indeed one of the key problems that remain is the lack of coherence within the international community between the positive developments being made by some sectors of the system, for example evidenced by the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food, and the way in which the policies and practices of States at agencies such as the IMF, World Bank and the WTO, undermine the protection of the right to food. Niger is one of many examples of this schizophrenia at play. Niger is a country in extreme poverty, but the IMF still imposes draconian structural adjustment policies, in particular on the agricultural sector. These policies have increased costs for pastoralists and farmers, leaving them poorer than ever before, and severely affecting food security for the most vulnerable.

State policies that relate to the right to food also show similar patterns of inconsistency. While all States have recognized the right to food in the World Food Summit Declarations, more than 150 States are parties to the ICESCR, and 192 have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, at the same time they engage in trade policies which have harmful negative consequences for the enjoyment of human rights in other countries. For example, the new EU Economic Partnership Agreements with the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries have the potential to have an enormous negative impact on peasant farmers, given unfair competition with highly subsidized EU production. In these countries where up to 80 per cent of the population can be involved in peasant agriculture, unfair competition may push millions of African, Caribbean and Pacific peoples out of agriculture, when there are few other employment options.

Other important issues still remain to be addressed, including the exclusion and discrimination of the most vulnerable, especially women and indigenous peoples, the increasing uncontrolled power of transnational corporations over the food system, desertification, armed conflict and agrofuels.

The sudden, ill-conceived rush to convert food, such as maize, wheat, sugar and palm oil, into fuels is a recipe for disaster. In this rush, there are serious risks of creating competition between food and fuel that will leave the poor and hungry in developing countries at the mercy of rapidly rising prices for food, land and water. If agro-industrial methods are pursued to turn food into fuel, then there are also risks that unemployment and violations of the right to food may result, unless specific measures are put in place to ensure that biofuels contribute to the development of small-scale farming.

The fight against hunger must therefore continue more forcefully as ever. The right to food must be respected by all States, by all intergovernmental organizations and by all non state actors including transnational corporations.

As Jean Jacques Rousseau said 250 years ago in *The Social Contract*: "Between the rich and the poor, it is freedom which oppresses and it is law which liberates."