



June 2008

'Hunger is a violation of human rights'

GENEVA – The Human Rights Council of the United Nations has called on all States and other relevant organizations to bring a human rights perspective into their activities to reduce and prevent hunger.

A resolution agreed at the conclusion of the Council's 22 May special session in Geneva on the impact of the world food crisis said measures should be taken to "ensure the realization of the right to food as an essential human rights objective."

In her speech to the Council, High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour said that, "while it is imperative to respond immediately to emergencies with commensurate humanitarian support and aid in order to address conditions of hunger, a human rights focus will contribute to making solutions more durable and more equitable in the medium and long run."

Such an approach, Ms Arbour said, would confront the reasons why the food crisis hurts some groups more than others, and help "clarify the imbalances in society that trigger or exacerbate the food crisis."

The High Commissioner also looked at the threat posed by the current crisis to socially and economically marginalized groups. "The ongoing emergency," she said, "may also reinforce long-entrenched patterns of exclusion and discrimination that have prevented the most vulnerable from claiming their rightful access to food in the first place. We must examine and address the repercussions of the crisis on those people already living in precarious and marginalized situations, particularly women and children, minorities and people with disabilities."

In a statement to the Council, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Mr Olivier De Schutter, said the food crisis was a man-made disaster with identifiable causes that obliged all States to act without delay to bring relief to the victims.

Mr De Schutter said agricultural policies, the international trade regime, climate change and food aid may appear to some as purely social, economic or humanitarian issues, but none of them could be addressed effectively without taking the right to be free from hunger into account. He asked the Council to send the message that "human rights are relevant to defining the future shape of global food policy."

The current crisis has been driven by what the World Bank estimates is an 83 per cent rise in overall food prices worldwide over the past three years. As of March 2008, wheat and maize prices were 130 and 30 per cent higher, respectively, than a year earlier. The cost of rice has more than doubled since the end of January 2008.

The Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that there are 854 million people who suffer from hunger in the world today. Another two billion endure malnutrition due to vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

"Yet," said a note from the countries that requested the special session of the Council, "the world can provide food to feed twice its current population. Therefore, in a world overflowing with riches, hunger is not inevitable. It is a violation of human rights."

(Source: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/FoodCrisis.aspx>)

For further information contact Marty Logan at OHCHR-Nepal:
Tel.: 428 0164 (Ext.321); Mobile 98510.16922 or mlogan@ohchr.org

