



TRANSCRIPT

Source: [Louv2.01x] Presenting a Report to the Human Rights Council

Olivier De Schutter: So this is the room of the Human Rights Council, where the delegates meet to listen to the special procedures of the Human Rights Council presenting their reports. And these reports are presented in front of this audience of senior diplomats, lead to an interactive dialogue between the diplomats and the special procedures of the Human Rights Council -- as they are called -- based on the studies and recommendations that the Special Rapporteurs present.

So in just a few minutes, it will be my turn to discuss the right to food and present what is my final report to the Human Rights Council today, this 10th of March, 2014. And I will then receive, for about two hours, the comments from delegations of different countries interested in me developing certain topics, and presenting the viewpoint of their state.

Session Chairman: Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, we shall now begin the clustered interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right of food.

It is my pleasure to welcome to the podium Mr. Olivier De Schutter, Special Rapporteur on the right to food, and Mrs. Raquel Rolnik, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing.

I now invite Mr. Olivier De Schutter to present his report. You have 14 minutes for your presentation, sir.

Olivier De Schutter: Thank you Mr. President. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I'm very honored to take the floor before the Human Rights Council for the last time in my present capacity as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. You have before you three reports. Two reports summarize the findings from my missions in Malawi and Malaysia, where I conducted official visits in 2013. And in addition, I shall have the honor of presenting a thematic report, the eighth report I'm presenting to the Human Rights Council since my appointment in 2008.

In this final report, I try to draw some conclusions from my six years as holder of the mandates of Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. Allow me to begin with a few words about the two country reports. I visited Malawi in July, 2013.

Malawi is, of course, one of the poorest countries in the world. Levels of malnutrition are alarmingly high. About half of all children under the age of five show signs of chronic malnutrition. Moreover, its demographic growth -- at 2.6% per year -- is one of the strongest in the world. As a result, the pressure on Malawi's natural resources is extreme.

Malawi is well known for its Farm Input Subsidy Program, FISP, initiated during the 2005-2006 growing season. This program relies on the distribution of seeds and fertilizers -- for a cost that represents about half the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture -- and between 8 and 16% of the total public budget of the state, depending on the costs of inputs in every single year. Though the program has had significant positive impact on the realization of right to food for small farmers, I conclude that this program is in urgent need of reform. The program's targeting is far from perfect. Its fiscal sustainability is in doubt, due to the rising cost of fertilizer imports, and the impact on the balance of payments of the country. And the program does not encourage the sustainable use of resources for food production. In fact, inorganic fertilizers in many ways may be masking soil nutrient depletion, rather than correcting it.

In my report, I therefore emphasize the need for a much greater diversification of agriculture, and for a Brown Revolution improving soil fertility, and a Blue Revolution improving water conservation, in addition to the Green Revolution component of the farm input subsidy program. The report addresses, of course, a wide range of other issues that have an impact on the enjoyment of the right to food in Malawi.

I cannot discuss these issues here, but I strongly believe that a framework law on the right to food would be extremely beneficial to the country. It would strengthen accountability and institutional oversight over food and nutrition security programs -- including in the way information is connected and the way the programs are assessed -- thus increasing transparency and safeguards against the use of political criteria in the targeting of programs. I trust that the government of Malawi will continue its constructive dialogue on these issues with my successor, and I would like to thank them for their constructive engagement with the Human Rights Council's special procedures.

In Malaysia, impressive progress was made in recent decades in reducing poverty. And the government has set as its target to transform Malaysia into an advanced, high-income country by 2020. It is now working on the formulation of the eleventh Malaysia plan 2011-2016, as well as on a national human rights action plan, to further move the country towards this target.

My mission, therefore, took place under particularly favorable circumstances. And it was particularly useful as these programs are now being designed. My report highlights three priorities for Malaysia.

First, while Malaysia has recently adopted a minimum-wage legislation, and has made progress towards providing safety nets to the population, many of these social protection schemes in Malaysia are instituted on an ad hoc basis, with a generally limited reach. And the schemes fail to

guarantee legal entitlements to support. I therefore welcome plans to develop a comprehensive social safety net, integrating and coordinating the various plans to develop a comprehensive social safety net into one coherent policy, and introducing a rights-based approach to social protection.

Secondly, as highlighted in the report of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia on land rights of indigenous peoples, access to land and resources of indigenous peoples, and their rights to give their free, prior, and informed consent for any change in their lands and territories -- this right should be strengthened further.

Third, Malaysia hosts some 4 million foreign workers, about half of which are undocumented. These workers are heavily represented, in particular on palm oil plantations. Serious concerns have been expressed about the legal situation and working conditions of these migrant workers, who often work under unfavorable employment terms, such as low wages and informal or unwritten contracts of employment.

This has a serious impact on the right of these workers to an adequate standard of living, including access to adequate food. I'm confident that the Government of Malaysia shall seek to remedy these gaps, and I would like to thank them for the very constructive spirit in which the visit was conducted.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, today I have the honor of presenting my final thematic report to the Human Rights Council. I was appointed in March, 2008 at the height of the global food price crisis. My first initiative was to call for the Council to convene a special session to address the human rights dimension of this crisis. The special session took place on the 22nd of May, 2008 -- the first time ever that the Human Rights Council addressed in a special session the emergency that resulted from this massive threat to social rights -- the right to food -- resulting from irrational markets driven by speculation, and largely manufactured fears about levels of stock.

By convening that special session, and by adopting then a resolution asking me to provide you with an assessment of the global food price crisis based on the human rights to adequate food, you sent a strong signal to the world. Your message was that hunger and malnutrition could be tackled, but that doing so required political will and a greater focus on the most marginalized groups of the population, whose income poverty and political disempowerment are mutually reinforcing.

Indeed, a few months ago at my last appearance before the Third Committee of the General Assembly during the 68th session of the General Assembly, I again emphasized the important role that the right to food could play in shaping the responses of States to the scandal of hunger and malnourishment. I insisted in my oral statement on hunger and malnutrition not being natural calamities due to poor soils or unfavorable skies.

But these are man-made curses, the result of depriving food producers from access to resources, of failing to protect workers' rights to living wages, or the failure to make progress on social protection and on gender empowerment. Therefore, the roles of accountability and participation,

of nondiscrimination and empowerment of the poor, are essential. Hunger, ultimately, is a political question, not a technical question alone.

Of course, you are familiar with my contributions and there is no need for me to detail them here. At the request of the Human Rights Council, I prepared two special reports on the global food price crisis. I also presented six interim reports to the General Assembly, including an initial report outlining my program of work, and five interim reports to the Human Rights Council.

A significant portion of my work went to examining how small-scale food producers could be supported. But I did not, of course, limit myself to the question of how to support this particularly vulnerable and fragile group. I also examined, for example, the contribution of women's rights to the right to food, emphasized the importance of nutrition, and improved the connection between agricultural policies and health concerns. I discussed the importance of speculation on the financial derivatives of agricultural commodities, as well as the problems associated with concentration in the food chains.

In a series of briefing notes, and in my latest report to the General Assembly, I documented a range of initiatives that have been taken in recent years to implement the rights to adequate food in legal, institutional, and policy frameworks in all regions. The progress was most impressive in Latin America. Africa is now following suit through various initiatives, linked in particular to the ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States, and the community of Portuguese-speaking states.

Those reports I presented were deliberately focused in nature. They offered an in-depth examination of certain specific themes, because I believe that even the largest problems -- such as hunger and malnutrition -- become manageable if we break them down in smaller pieces.

In the final report I'm presenting today, I draw conclusions of a more general nature based on a more holistic analysis of the causes of hunger and malnutrition, and on the potential of an approach based on the right to food to tackle these causes. Three key messages emerge from my work.

A first message is that the paradigm through which hunger and malnutrition have been addressed until six years ago has been changed dramatically. In the past, it was believed that the solution to these problems was an increasing production combined with trade and aid, to channel food from food surplus regions to food deficit regions.

This paradigm, unfortunately, was a disincentive to supporting farmers who were not sufficiently equipped to survive in the emerging global competition, and resulted in an addiction of whole regions to cheap foodstuffs imported from abroad. I documented these problems in the report that followed my mission to the World Trade Organization in 2008, and in the more recent document calling for food security objectives to be better taken into account in trade discussions. This old paradigm we have now learned is not sustainable.

The consensus today has changed. The consensus today is that we must support the ability of each region to feed itself, and to reinvest in local production. The deconcentration of food

production is the best adaptation strategy against climate change, and it is also the best means to reduce rural poverty in the developing world.

The problem, however, is that not all such world policies are aligned with this new post-food crisis paradigm. In particular, many trade negotiators still tend to measure success by increase of trade volumes, rather than by improvements in rural development and the reduction of rural poverty. Against this background, better aligning trade policies on the new food security agenda should be treated as an urgent priority.

A second message follows. Under the past 20th Century paradigm, most efforts went to supporting export-led agriculture, large scale, linked to global supply chains and large markets, and competitive. Farmers were encouraged to produce commodities for the food-processing industry, rather than food for their communities.

Small-scale farmers were disadvantaged twice. They were not well equipped to satisfy the exigencies of global supply chains and large commodity buyers, and they were the first victims of the dumping occurring on their own domestic markets. The result is that local agrifood systems were underdeveloped, and so were local and regional markets.

This imbalance must be remedied. It is high time to improve access of small-scale farmers to local markets, and to develop local and regional markets.

A third message, finally, concerns the means through which the transition towards more balanced food systems can be achieved, recognizing the important function of local agrifood systems, and improving connections of small-scale farmers to markets. It is here that the right to food has a crucial role to play.

For change to be achieved, we need local communities to be given political space. We need ordinary citizens to enter into discussions with local producers, agrifood corporations, retailers, and public authorities, to identify the range of measures that could be taken to improve the resilience of the food systems they depend on, and to move towards systems that are more equitable, more environmentally sustainable, and make a better contribution to local development. This is what food policy councils in a rapidly growing movement across the world are trying to achieve.

So I conclude on the need for more food democracy. And my final report emphasizes the need to improve participation and accountability to remove the existing lock-ins. This to me is the important message from the broad social movements rallying behind the idea of food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty has never been about autarchy, which is neither desirable nor achievable. And it is not opposed to trade. But it does ask -- and it asks rightly -- who decides in food systems for the benefit of whom, and on the basis of which considerations? It is a call for food systems that are designed in a more open, transparent, and inclusive way. The objectives of food sovereignty are therefore closely aligned with the requirements of the right to food.

In closing, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which provided excellent support to the mandate throughout these six years. I would also like to thank the many non-governmental organizations that have increasingly been referring to the right to food in their work, for providing me with highly valuable information. And of course, I would like to thank the governments -- and you, the delegates to the Human Rights Council -- for the high quality of the cooperation that we have developed throughout the mandate. And I look forward to our discussion. Thank you.