



Statement by Mr. Jean Ziegler
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD

62nd session of the General Assembly
Third Committee
Item 70(b)

25 October 2007
New York



Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First let me express my sincere thanks for giving me the opportunity to address you during the 62nd session of this Assembly.

The right to food is defined as:

“the right to have regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free of fear”.

Today I regret that 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, such as China, India, South Africa, and several Latin American and Caribbean countries, there has been little overall progress in reducing the number of victims of hunger and malnutrition around the world. 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 and I would like to draw this Assembly's attention to the fact that there is so much work still to be done in promoting and protecting the right to adequate food. As elaborated in my report before you, I would like,

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in particular, to call the attention of this Assembly to two emerging issues, which the international community will need to examine thoroughly and take remedial actions on because of the negative impact they have on the realization of the right to food. The first is the issue of the potentially grave negative impacts of biofuels (or agrofuels) on the right to food. The second is the urgent need to improve protection for people who are fleeing from hunger, famine and starvation in their countries of origin and face numerous human rights violations if they try to cross borders into developed countries.

I am gravely concerned that biofuels will bring hunger in their wake. The sudden, ill-conceived, dash to convert food – such as maize, wheat, sugar and palm oil - into fuels is a recipe for disaster. There are serious risks of creating a battle 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 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 peasant and family farming. Instead of using food crops, biofuels should be made from non-food plants and agricultural wastes, reducing competition for food, land and water.

I am also alarmed by the many refugees that are fleeing hunger, famine and starvation in their own countries, who are treated as little more than criminals if they attempt to cross borders into developed countries. Tens of thousands of people every year risk their lives to flee hunger and continue to be deported back to their countries of origin, even if their lives will be again at risk from hunger and famine. It is time for national and international protection mechanisms to be strengthened, as only then will Governments take seriously their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food of all human beings around the world.

Other important issues still remain to be addressed, for example, the lack of coherence within the international community, between the positive developments introduced by some sectors, for example, the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food, and the policies and practices of other agencies such as the IMF, World Bank and the WTO, which sometimes undermine the protection of the right to food. State policies that have implications for the right to food also show similar patterns of inconsistency, between the commitments expressed in the World Food Summit Declaration and obligations taken by ratifying the International

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Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and their trade policies which have harmful negative consequences for the enjoyment of human rights in other countries.

Another phenomenon which is greatly affecting the right to adequate food is the growing power of so-called 'non-state actors' on the international scene: transnational corporations. These actors are ever more powerful, yet we lack control mechanisms to guard against the violations of the right to food some of them are sometimes involved in.

Other issues which remain on the agenda, and which will require significant work in the future, are the exclusion and discrimination of the most vulnerable segments of the society, particularly, women and indigenous people, as well as the issues of desertification and armed conflict.

Some governments and important intergovernmental organizations support economic, political and legal theories that do not recognize the existence of economic, social and cultural human rights and claim that only political and civil rights are human rights. According to such theories, only a liberalized world economy based on private initiative and free trade can gradually eliminate hunger and malnutrition in the world.

I respect the plurality of opinions, but the evidence shows the contrary – liberalization and privatization have progressed rapidly in most countries during the last ten years and the figures show that more people than ever before suffer today from grave, permanent undernourishment. I maintain that only the normative approach can gradually eliminate hunger and grave permanent malnutrition in the world. The right to food has to be implemented by all States, by all intergovernmental organizations and by all non state actors including multinational 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.”

Thank you.