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Statement by Mr. Olivier De Schutter
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome this opportunity to have an exchange with you about my work during the past year, and especially about the report I am presenting today.

Much has happened since I last had a dialogue with you. I have conducted three missions, respectively to Cameroon, Canada, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, to examine how the implementation of the right to food could be improved in these countries or in the work of that organization. The conclusions will be presented to the Human Rights Council in March of next year, but I would like to thank the delegations concerned for their openness and for their willingness to enter into a discussion as to how we can move towards food systems that guarantee the right to food for all, using the principles of participation, accountability and non-discrimination, as our foundation to achieve this.

Much of my energy during 2012 has been dedicated to strengthening the right to food movement in Africa. In April, I convened a two-day roundtable in Nairobi in which parliamentarians, representatives of Government institutions, non-governmental organizations, national human rights institutions and international agencies from nine countries of Eastern and Southern Africa, met in order to assess how the countries of the region are making progress towards the establishment of the legal, institutional and policy frameworks that can make a difference to the lives of those living in poverty and improve the effectiveness of food security strategies. In July in Maputo, the Community of Portuguese-speaking countries (CPLP) met at ministerial level, establishing the Food and Nutrition Security Council, and encouraging its member States to move towards the full implementation of the right to food. Angola, Cape Verde, East Timor, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique already have national right to food strategies in place, soon to be joined by others.

Two weeks ago, with the support of the German government, ECOWAS has launched a "West Africa without Hunger" initiative, inspired by the remarkable progress made under the Latin America and the Caribbean without Hunger initiative inaugurated in 2005 with the leadership of the Heads of State of Brazil and Guatemala. The right to food movement in Africa is making important progress on these different fronts. I have published two briefing notes to report on the progress made, dedicated respectively to Eastern and Southern Africa and to Latin American and the Caribbean, and I shall shortly announce an initiative of a similar nature to support the right to food in West Africa.

As you are aware, I have also been working recently on social protection as a key component of right to food strategies. With my esteemed colleague the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Ms. Magdalena Sepulveda, I have proposed a Global Fund for Social Protection, with a dual purpose: (a) to bridge the financing gap that Least-Developed Countries may face when establishing the social protection floors called for by the International Labour Conference, and (b) to ensure that these countries can be insured against the risk of the standing social protection schemes they put in place becoming impossible to finance in the face of external or domestic shocks. The idea is simple: we need to support the efforts of LDCs in establishing social protection floors, because it is a shared responsibility to support the implementation of the right to social security and the right to food, and because it is an investment in the future of these countries. I am delighted to report that the 39th session

of the Committee on World Food Security, which I attended in Rome earlier this month, expressed its interest for this proposal, referring explicitly to the need for enhanced international cooperation in this area.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The report that is before you today provides an assessment of the contribution of fisheries to global food security and examines how the right to food can guide our efforts towards sustainable fisheries. In preparing this report, I benefited from the support of some of the leading experts in the world, and I was actively supported also by UNEP and by the FAO Department on Fisheries and Aquaculture.

There is a considerable gap between the importance of the issue and the degree of attention it is usually given in discussions concerning food security. In fora such as the Committee on World Food Security, fisheries are generally referred to only in passing, almost as an afterthought. But fish consumption accounts for 15 per cent of all animal protein consumed worldwide, and it is 20 per cent in low-income food deficit countries (LIFDCs), and up to 50 per cent in West Africa. There are at least 30 countries where fisheries contribute over a third of total animal protein supply, and 22 of these are LIFDCs. In addition, the fisheries sector provides employment to more than 200 million people, if we include employment in upstream and downstream activities. In developing countries, many of those involved in fishing are small-scale fishers, who practice a form of fishing that is highly labor-intensive. The importance of small-scale fishing is generally underestimated because of the volume of unreported catch and because some of this small-scale fishing is purely occasional, functioning as an essential safety net for coastal communities in times of crisis.

My report explains the environmental challenges facing the fisheries sector. The rise in atmospheric carbon dioxide leads to increased sea temperatures and ocean acidification, adversely impacting fish populations. Oil spills, agricultural and industrial run-off, pollution from aquaculture, and the enormous accumulation of plastic debris in water will have lasting impacts on marine wildlife, contributing to dead zones in the ocean.

Overfishing is also a major challenge. The capacity of the global aggregate fishing fleet is at least double that needed to exploit the oceans sustainably, a trend exacerbated by public subsidies which further increase fishing capacity. Fishing methods such as industrial bottom trawling – the equivalent of deforestation in deep waters – are particularly destructive and wasteful. The report shows how current efforts to combat illegal, unregulated, unrecorded (IUU) fishing fail in part because of capacity gaps and weak governance in developing countries, and lack of commitment by the flag States to investigate and prosecute their distant water fishing fleets. And coastal communities will not be in a position to participate in regimes that seek to reduce overfishing or combat IUU fishing without access to adequate social protection, without fair prices, or if they are priced out of a fair share of fisheries resources through the licensing of fishing rights.

The FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) is currently developing International Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries. This is a highly important initiative, because although there is widespread support in favor of the idea that small-scale fishers must be better protected, there are diverging views as to how to ensure such protection. Some propose

to clarify and strengthen access rights, through an approach based on transferable fishing quotas. I found, however, that this could lead to rent capture by certain actors in a privileged position, which is difficult to reconcile with poverty-reduction objectives. Instead, from a right to food perspective, I found as a more promising proposal the granting of exclusive rights for small-scale fishers in coastal areas or on lakes, as has been done in Cambodia in Tonle Sap lake. I also explain why co-management schemes are the best way to establish sustainable approaches to managing fishing intensity and ecosystems impacts. While some co-management schemes have failed, I found that such failures are often the result of communities not having been sufficiently involved in setting policy objectives or in ensuring that policy-making and evaluation are based on local knowledge of fish and marine ecosystems.

My report concludes with a number of recommendations. It proposes to involve local fishing communities in the design, implementation and assessment of the fisheries policies and interventions affecting them, in accordance with human rights norms and standards. It encourages States to:

- (a) Regulate the industrial fishing sector in order to protect the access rights of traditional fishing communities;
- (b) Consider the introduction of exclusive artisanal fishing zones and exclusive user rights to small-scale and subsistence fisheries, where appropriate;
- (c) Strengthen the position of small-scale fishers in the production chain, for instance, by supporting the formation of cooperatives and supporting them to expand into the high-added values stages of the industry;
- (d) Support fishers groups wishing to access export markets, under conditions that provide decent employment and promote sustainable fisheries management;
- (e) Provide adequate social protection or safety net interventions to communities who depend on fishing for their livelihoods in order to reduce the need for food-insecure and/or low-income groups to engage in potentially unsustainable subsistence fishing practices in times of crisis; and
- (f) Take measures that support women's role in the fisheries sector, for instance by ensuring access to credit for women and providing adequate facilities for them at landing sites.

I look forward to your comments.