



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

**ORAL STATEMENT OF MR. JEAN ZIEGLER,
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD**

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Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First let me express my sincere thanks for giving me the opportunity to address you in the framework of the assessment of my mandate.

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.

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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. My general reports and my country reports are available. I am especially grateful to the FAO, UNICEF, WFP, OHCHR, and many NGOs (such as Action contre la faim, Oxfam and FIAN) and other organisations and individuals, for their precious help. I am also grateful for the cooperation I received from many governments, especially during my country missions.

The key point that I would like to draw to the Council's attention today is that 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 remains is the lack of coherence within the United Nations system, 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 other 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 and more than 150 States are parties to the ICESCR, 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 has 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

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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, for example the exclusion and discrimination of the most vulnerable. Out of the 854 million people who suffer from hunger, 50% are small farmers, 20% are landless rural dwellers, 10% are nomadic herders or small-scale fishermen, and 20% live in urban poverty. 70% of them are women or girls. Particular attention has to be given to the protection of the right to food for disadvantaged groups, especially women and indigenous people. These hundreds of millions of people are hungry because they are effectively excluded from most decision-making processes, and this poses a significant challenge to be addressed. I have witnessed the devastating effects of this problem, for example, the exclusion and discrimination against women in some countries of the Horn of Africa, likewise the land-less farmers in Brazil, and indigenous people in Central America.

Other phenomenon which are greatly affecting the right to adequate food is the powerful so-called 'new 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 responsible for committing.

Other issues which remain on the agenda, and which will require significant work in the future, are desertification, biofuels and armed conflict.

Desertification: 200 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa (almost one quarter of the total population of the continent) are suffering from chronic and grave malnutrition. Sub-Saharan Africa has some of the most impoverished soil on the planet. In some Sahel regions the Sahara is progressing almost one kilometer per year to the south.

Armed conflict: international humanitarian law forbids the destruction of agricultural installation during armed conflict. This prescription is often violated.

Biofuels: Increasing production of biofuels leads to unaffordable food and water prices and increasing competition over land and forests, resulting in forced evictions.

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It is evident that much work remains to be done in addressing these issues, and for this reason I strongly recommend that the Council continue this mandate.

Some governments and important intergovernmental organizations support the neo-liberal theory. This theory does not recognize the existence of economic, social and cultural human rights and claims that only political and civil rights are human rights. According to this theory, only a totally liberalized and privatized free world market can gradually eliminate hunger and malnutrition in the world.

I respect the plurality of opinions, but the evidence shows the contrary – liberalization and privatization has 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. Consequently, 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.