

**Check against delivery**



**Statement by Hilal Elver  
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT FOOD**

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Mr. Chairperson,  
Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to present my first report to the General Assembly in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on the right to food.

When I assumed the mandate in June of this year I was aware of the exceptional contribution made by my predecessors in promoting the realization of the right to adequate food. I was also aware of the challenges that I would face in further developing the mandate and ensuring that the right to adequate food is placed at the center of discussions on food security and eradicating hunger. The task is enormous for all of us, with many obstacles.

Adopting a human rights approach to food security and nutrition is a vital component of this endeavor as we aim to develop new targets through the Sustainable Development Goals. The key elements of the human rights based approach to sustainable development, as defined by the UN system, includes people-centered development, attention to root causes, broad public participation, inclusion, accountability, non-discrimination, and reducing inequalities.

As the former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, outlined in her letter to the Secretary General: “there will be no development without equality, no progress without freedom, no peace without justice. No sustainability without human rights.”

2014 marks the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the ‘Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security’, it is also a year of reflection for global food policy makers as they take stock of progress made since then.

While there has been considerable legislative and judicial progress in many countries throughout the world since 2004, eradicating hunger and ensuring access to adequate food has not been universally achieved. More than 800 million people still go to bed hungry, while 2 billion are nutrient deficient, most of them living in Africa and South Asia, from remote villages to urban slums.

Since I became a Special Rapporteur I have had the honor of participating in a number of public engagements including an event organized by the FAO to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Right to Food Guidelines, and last week, I participated in the General Assembly of the Committee on World Food Security in Rome. Frustration and disappointment were articulated by both States and civil society representatives in relation to the challenges facing all stakeholders in advancing the human rights approach to the progressive realization of the right to food. They also referred to good practices, and success stories in individual countries

I believe that it is time for the international community to look to the future and establish what more can be done to ensure an enabling environment for people to access food in a dignified manner and to establish applicable remedies for those who are unable to do so. A key focus should now be placed on the implementation of relevant legal frameworks and policies to promote the right to adequate food for all. Indeed it is the responsibility of *all* States, individually and through international co-operation, to implement sustainable food system policies as well as through international trade and investment policies and practices, to take necessary measures to meet the vital food needs of their people, especially of vulnerable groups and households.

*Ladies and gentlemen*

As I present my program of work to you today, I am conscious of the fact that global food security is constantly changing and impacted upon by many issues (politics, global economy, agricultural market volatilities, quantity oriented agriculture policies, consumer behavior, climate change, extreme weather events, and fluctuating food and oil prices). As such I have identified a tentative description

of priorities going forward which I expect will evolve over the course of my mandate:

**Implementing the right to food and access to justice:** While the right to food may once have been a controversial ‘positive’ right, it is now enshrined in international human rights law with States obliged to ensure its progressive realization, through ratification of international treaties and the development of supportive domestic and national legislation. States are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the right to adequate food for its citizens. However, many countries have failed to develop a judicial culture of recognition in practice or the necessary legal frameworks required to ensure that the rights enshrined in the ICESCR are justiciable. The entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the ICESCR in May 2013 provides an additional remedial mechanism. I intend to work closely with civil society to promote ratification and use of the Optional Protocol and to bring human rights violations to the attention of the Committee on ESCR as a means of eradicating hunger and promoting the right to adequate food. I will also focus my first thematic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2015 on justiciability of the right to food.

**Empowerment of women:** Women play a vital role in food security and nutrition. As farm labourers, vendors, unpaid care workers, and mothers, women are responsible for food production and preparation in many countries and regions throughout the world yet they continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, malnutrition and significant difficulties in accessing resources such as land, water, and financial and technical assistance. Besides structural difficulties, women and girls further suffer from discriminatory laws, social norms, and intra-family discrimination that create unequal positions for women. The empowerment of women and the protection of their rights should be placed at the center of the right to food policy-making process and should not be limited to rural areas, but should also be extended to urban women, as well as women from indigenous communities, those living in refugee camps, undocumented migrants, and ethnic, racial and religious minorities. I intend to give emphasis to the key roles played by women in ensuring food security, from production to consumption, by addressing gender gaps related to secure and equal access to assets and productive resources; analyzing the effects of unpaid work on women’s right to food; and considering the need for mainstreaming women’s rights in legislative frameworks, programs and policies related to food security and nutrition.

**Children and the right to food:** The first five years of a child’s life are the most important in terms of human development, and focus must be given to encouraging investment in future generations by providing healthy, adequate nutritious food for all young children. Globally, 51 million children under 5 years suffer from acute malnutrition, putting them at immediate risk of death. Chronic malnutrition leads to stunting- an irreversible condition that literally stunts the physical and cognitive growth of children, with life long consequences that effects everything from school performance to future earnings. Some 165 million children, approximately 1 in 4 children globally, suffers from stunting, with more than two million children under five dying every year as a result of poor nutrition. Yet, proven interventions to reduce stunting exist by improving women’s nutrition, early and exclusive breastfeeding, and appropriate micronutrient interventions. Breastfeeding is a cornerstone for child survival, nutrition and early childhood development. Yet, globally only 40 % of children are exclusively breastfed.

In contrast to under-nutrition, developed and middle income countries, as well as the poorest countries of the world are now faced with rising levels of chronic diseases related to obesity, including heart disease, diabetes and some cancers. Dietary changes associated with processed food and the excessive consumption of sugar, fat and salt are largely to blame. Ensuring food security including a nutritious diet makes a vital contribution to achieving a healthy society, both physically and mentally. By working together with UN organizations, donor countries and civil society, I will make every effort to raise global awareness of the right of every child to enjoy the benefits of healthy, nutritious, sustainable food, with particular focus on the critical first 1,000 day of a child’s life.

**Climate change:** Climate Change, sustainable resource management and food security are now widely considered among the most complex, interdependent and urgent global policy challenges. Individuals and communities already in vulnerable situations and at risk of discrimination due to geography, poverty, gender, age, indigenous or minority status and disability are often disproportionately affected. Climate change is already having a significant impact on approximately 1 billion of the world's poor. I wish to note that I will focus on the adverse effects of climate change on the effective enjoyment of human rights (and particularly the right to food) as a cross cutting theme throughout my mandate, consistent with the Human Rights Council resolution adopted at its 26<sup>th</sup> session in June 2014. In particular, I will focus on the impact of climate change on the right to food of the most vulnerable groups in society, and will analyze the gender dimensions of food security and nutrition within the context of climate change. Time is of the essence. Before the 2015 Paris meeting of the UNFCCC, human rights defenders and civil society organizations should make every effort to cooperate in order to ensure that a human rights based approach to climate change is adopted, and that there is clear commitment from all relevant parties to ensuring climate justice for all.

**Global food loss and food waste:** Approximately one point three billion tonnes, representing almost one third of the world's total food production for human consumption, is wasted per year. This is equivalent to more than half of the world's annual cereal production. More must be done to develop global protocols to measure food loss and waste, and I support the goal outlined in the UN Zero Hunger Challenge to achieve zero loss or waste of food. While the challenge does not rely on legally binding obligations it offers States an opportunity to review current policies in relation to food waste. Several constructive steps have been taken by some States to reduce food waste and I plan to examine such examples of good practice and will assess food waste during official country visits.

**The right to food in emergency situations and armed conflict:** The world is currently blighted by a plethora of ongoing humanitarian crises and armed conflicts which are having a devastating impact on the lives of millions of people around the globe. The international community must take greater responsibility for emergency food crises and must comply with international human rights and humanitarian law in doing so. During my tenure I intend to monitor situations of ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis particularly those with populations experiencing acute vulnerability with respect to food security as a result of a humanitarian emergency or protracted conflict. I also hope to contribute to the articulation of the principles outlined in the "Framework for Action for Addressing Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in Protracted Crises" currently being drafted by the Committee on World Food Security and to promote the final document in discussions around the world.

**Sustainable development goals and the right to food:** With the MDGs reaching their target date in 2015 the international community is currently reflecting on progress made to date. While significant progress has been made over the past 14 years much remains to be done. The proposed Sustainable Development Goals which are currently under negotiation should adopt a rights based approach and include mechanisms for establishing a transparent participatory process in decision making involving people directly affected by hunger, extreme poverty and injustice. Vulnerable groups in particular must be afforded the same rights as others in this process. Efforts must also be made to ensure that accountability mechanisms are in place to allow victims and organizations representing them to hold Governments to account for failure to comply with their international responsibility in relation to the right to food. Women's equal access to land and resources should also be included, along with specific targets to ensure asset redistribution among different social groups in relation to the use of land, ocean credits, technology, intellectual and cultural property.

Excellency's,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The priorities I have identified are inter-related. It is not possible to develop a successful sustainable policy framework to eradicate hunger, provide adequate and nutritious food accessible to all without

considering the specific requirements of women and children or to avoid focusing on the adverse impact of climate change on food security. It should be understood that this mandate encompasses issues relating to corporate responsibility with respect to global food policy and practices, and linkages between private sector behavior, trade policies, and regulatory frameworks at the domestic and international level.

In order to advance the implementation of the right to adequate food renewed political commitment is essential, and we must look to those countries that have made significant progress in adopting policies and legislation in this regard. Priority must be given to the adoption of a vigorous human rights approach in every global governance sphere in order to reach a sustainable, just, equitable world order.

I believe that together we can work together to end hunger and ensure that everyone has access to adequate and nutritious food and I look forward to extending cooperation with all interested parties on issues relevant to the mandate over the coming years.

Thank you.

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