

A summary of
The Report of the Special Rapporteur on
the Right to Food, December 24, 2012
by Olivier De Schutter

Background

- * based on Olivier De Schutter's findings from visiting across Canada May 6 to 16, 2012
- * visited Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Aboriginal communities in Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta
- * presented at the UN March 4, 2013

The legal and policy framework

Canada required to protect the right to food by the:

- * International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- * Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
- * Convention on the Rights of the Child

But Canadian law does not uphold the right to food.

Rapporteur concerned that Canada is fulfilling less and less of its international human rights obligations.

The legal and policy framework

Encouraged by :

- * provincial initiatives, e.g. poverty reduction and specific food policies
- * municipal and inclusive food policy councils

But concerned about:

- * no comprehensive provincial or national food strategies yet
- * study of food insecurity demographics in Canada impeded by the scrapping of the mandatory census long form and defunding the National Council of Welfare

Food availability: agricultural policies

Encouraged by:

- * local food systems and their support through food policy councils

But concerned with:

- * increased emphasis on export-focused and unsustainable agriculture, decreasing farm incomes, precarious situation of temporary migrant farm workers
- * pressures on local procurement such as the possible Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with the EU
- * end of “orderly marketing systems” such as the Canadian Wheat Board
- * increased emphasis on local food internationally could reduce demand for imports from Canada

Food accessibility: protecting access to food for the poorest

Encouraged by:

- * provincial and territorial poverty reduction strategies

But concerned with:

- * growing income gap
- * inadequate social assistance
- * replacement of the Canada Assistance Program (CAP)
- * housing costs (need a national housing strategy)
- * inadequate minimum wage
- * growth of “private and charity-based food aid” (p. 4)
- * social spending cuts esp. during economic crisis
- * tax cuts as compromising funds for social spending

Food adequacy

Encouraged by:

- * some good initiatives at the provincial and national levels (but still require more)

Concerned about:

- * implications of high levels of adult and child obesity and overweight on human health and the economy

Suggests:

- * measures like bans on food advertising to children, rezoning for healthy food access, junk food taxes

Food aid and development cooperation

Encouraged by:

- * Canada had been investing more money to advance food security internationally

But concerned about:

- * impact of 2012 budget cuts to official development assistance on CIDA and International Development Research Centre
- * failure to make decisions through human rights

Indigenous peoples

Encouraged by:

- * **Canada's endorsement of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2010**

But concerned about:

- * **exceptionally high levels of low income for Aboriginal people off-reserve and food insecurity esp. as reported for First Nations children in Northern Manitoba and adults in Nunavut**
- * **transparency of the Nutrition North Canada program**
- * **the influence on traditional food sources by climate change, pollution, loss of hunting lands through development, inaccessible costs of equipment, deskilling, time constraints**
- * **the loss of Indigenous rights to land**

Recommendations

- * **“a comprehensive rights-based national food strategy” (p. 20) including a strategy for children’s food security within a legal framework that allows for the strategy to evolve**
- * **adequate social assistance rates and a legal framework to enforce the right to them**
- * **housing benefits reform**
- * **adequate minimum wage that can support workers and their families**
- * **realization of rights to land and water access for Aboriginal people**
- * **agricultural marketing criteria that allows for greater participation by smaller, new and alternative farms**
- * **international cooperation efforts that reflect human rights as outlined in Canada’s Official Development Assistance Accountability Act**

Implications

- * FSC has written letters to Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Health asking for implementation of recommendations
- * April 26- UNHR council examines human rights conditions in Canada (this report should inform it and will become part of Canada's human rights record)
- * Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (this report will also inform assessment of Canada's compliance with)
- * Rapporteur states the most important response will be that from civil society groups, e.g. PFPP

Food Secure Canada. (March 4, 2013). *The Right to Food in Canada: A community conversation*. [Audio recording]. Retrieved from <http://foodsecurecanada.org/>

Response by Canadian Government to the Report

- * Canada has a high standard of living and many programs to support specific populations
- * Canada is a leader in international aid for food security
- * The Special Rapporteur exceeded his mandate, underestimated Canada's federal framework, neglected to visit the North

(no other admission in this report by the Government of the issues raised by Rapporteur, no commitment except to examine the recommendations)

Government of Canada. (March 4, 2013). *Country Response to the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Statement by the Delegation of Canada*. (Human Rights Council 22-Session, Geneva). Retrieved from <http://foodsecurecanada.org/sites/foodsecurecanada.org/files/CanadaResponseToUNRepport.pdf>

References

Unless noted, entirely from:

De Schutter, O. (December 24, 2012). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter, Addendum, Mission to Canada*. Retrieved from http://www.srfood.org/images/stories/pdf/officialreports/20121224_canadafinal_en.pdf