



## **Support message of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food and the Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty**

Poverty is a denial of human dignity. It is the cause and result of protracted violations of many human rights: not only the right to food, education, housing, and health, but also the right to participate in public affairs and to fair and equal treatment before the law. People living in poverty are often discriminated against because they are poor, and the cycle of discrimination and poverty is increasingly difficult for them to break.

There is a widely held belief that poverty is an inevitable part of life in every society, particularly in developing countries. Often, the extreme poor are seen to be responsible for their own poverty, and in many countries these attitudes are reflected in laws which criminalise behaviours associated with poverty. But poverty is no accident of fate. In 2008, between 130 and 155 million people fell into poverty due to soaring food and oil prices. The current economic crisis is expected to increase the estimated number of people living with less than USD\$1.25 a day by 46 million; the ranks of those living with less USD\$2.00 will rise by 53 million. These crises are systemic and their origins lie within the workings of financial markets themselves.

At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders stressed “the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair”. The challenge is to translate this commitment into concrete action. A human rights approach to poverty is dedicated to implementing this commitment. It calls for a paradigm shift in how we see and address poverty, and focuses on actions necessary to achieve social justice.

The human rights approach seeks to identify when poverty is created by State actions or omissions; by policy choices, rather than by nameless economic forces. It requires that we investigate the root causes of inequalities, and demand accountability for the actions, or failures to act, that produce, perpetuate and exacerbate poverty.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) go hand in hand with the Millennium Declaration, in which States resolved to spare no effort to free the world’s population from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty and from want. They further committed to strive for the full protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all in all countries.

The initiative to translate the MDGs into legislation to reduce poverty is welcome and timely as it seeks to apply an approach based on human rights principles and standards to combating poverty and social exclusion. We are delighted to be able to lend support for such initiative which we hope will make a difference in the lives of the millions of poor around the world. We also hope that other institutions will follow suit in extending support for this initiative and States will fully embrace it.

Let us remember that fighting against poverty is not a matter of charity but an obligation of every State. Combating discrimination, respecting, protecting and promoting human rights is integral in eradicating poverty in every State, rich and poor. It allows people to have the capacity and the power to make choices for their own lives, and it embodies the vision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of a world free from want and fear.

***Olivier De Schutter** was appointed the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food in 2008 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. He is independent from any government or organization. He teaches International Human Rights Law at the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium). For additional information, please visit: [www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index) or [www.srfood.org](http://www.srfood.org).*

***Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona** was appointed as Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2008. She is independent from any government or organization. She is Research Director at the International Council on Human Rights Policy (Switzerland). For additional information, please visit: [www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/expert/index.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/expert/index.htm)*