

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
March 4, 2013**

Canada is recognized internationally as a country with an enviable standard of living. It consistently ranks near the top of the UN's Human Development Index. The great majority of Canadians are food secure. Canada works actively at all levels of government towards this objective for all its citizens, including First Nations, Metis and Inuit.

Our own statistics tell us, however, that there are vulnerable persons and groups for whom regular access to food remains a challenge. This is an issue that the Canadian government takes seriously. As the Special Rapporteur notes in his report, Canada is taking concrete steps to address the challenges faced by vulnerable populations in accessing safe and nutritious food.

Across the country, Canada has culturally-sensitive, community-based programs in place that target vulnerable populations and promote nutrition and improved access to nutritious foods. Programs have a common thread of empowering individuals and communities; increasing access to services and supports; and improving coordination at the community level for the delivery of programs and services. Canada also has targeted programming for specific First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations as well as immigrant and refugee preschool children and families.

Canada recognizes that food security for Aboriginal peoples is linked to a variety of factors. One such factor is access to traditional food, or country food as it is known in the North. People continue to eat traditional food which is central to individual and community health. Traditional food also retains symbolic and spiritual value for Aboriginal peoples living in the North. Sale of traditional food products (made from animal skins, antlers, etc) is an important traditional industry that allows people to earn a living and support their families. Canada is also deeply committed to programs and initiatives, such as Nutrition North Canada, that promote increased access to healthy food for Aboriginal peoples.

Canada is also a leader in advancing global food security. Improving food security is one of Canada's five international assistance priorities. In April 2011, Canada became the first G8 country to officially meet its L'Aquila Food Security Initiative commitment, having disbursed \$1.18 billion for sustainable agricultural development from 2008-09 to 2010-11. I would also like to note that Canada is co-hosting a side event tomorrow on improving child nutrition in fragile and conflict affected countries.

In his Report, the Special Rapporteur has attempted to assess Canadian laws, programs and policies affecting the right to adequate food in Canada. Canada has a number of concerns with the approach taken as well as some of the conclusions drawn by the report.

First, the Special Rapporteur has focussed on some issues well beyond his mandate. In particular, Canada is of the view that an assessment of the domestic implementation of the right to food does not require an examination of the constitutional status of Canada's indigenous peoples or unfounded criticisms of Canada's trade or international assistance policy. Canada also notes with concern that the report includes sweeping assertions regarding the general direction of its agricultural policies, as well as its development assistance.

Unfortunately, the Special Rapporteur has demonstrated a regrettable lack of understanding with respect to Canada's constitutional framework and the size and diversity of our nation. The Special Rapporteur has made several recommendations which suggest that the federal government could or should interfere in the jurisdiction of other orders of government despite Canada's explanation of the clear separation of powers under our Constitution.

Canada is a federal state. Canada is disappointed that UN mechanisms have often failed to appreciate the cooperative nature of our multi-faceted and complex system of government. Canada does not see federalism as a problem or an excuse; Canada sees its system of government as a strength. Canada's international treaty obligations are implemented through laws, regulations, policies and programs at all orders of government – federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and self-governing Aboriginal communities. In practice, this combination creates a multiplier effect in strengthening the human rights framework in Canada, and realizing the common goal of increasing food security within the country.

Canada observes that the work of special procedures is more effective when the independent experts appointed to them follow appropriate working methods and abide by their mandates. Increased analytical rigour as well as a better understanding of the realities of Canada, including its normative and institutional frameworks, would have enhanced the utility of the Special Rapporteur's report. For example, it would have been useful for the Special Rapporteur to have visited the Arctic during his visit to Canada to better understand the Inuit culture and the challenges and opportunities the people face.

Canada is examining the recommendations put forward by the Special Rapporteur.

We will continue to work actively for the people of Canada.

Thank you.