

UPDATES

Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food on Her Mission to Zambia

At the invitation of the government, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Hilal Elver, undertook a mission to Zambia from 3-12 May 2017 to assess the progress made and challenges faced in realising the human right to adequate food.

During her stay, she met with representatives of the ministries of Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock, Health, Gender and Child Development, National Planning, Commerce, Trade and Industry, and Community Development and Social Services. In addition to meeting the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit of the Office of the Vice President, she met with the Human Rights Commissioner as well as various traditional authorities, international organisations, and national civil society actors.

Zambia is a landlocked country with fertile soil and water-rich farmlands. While it values its peace and social cohesion, increasing land tensions could have a detrimental effect on this. Over the past decades, the country has enjoyed political stability and consistent economic growth, but it nonetheless faces numerous challenges in the form of food insecurity, undernutrition, chronic poverty and natural disasters. Like many southern African countries, it suffers from increasingly unpredictable weather patterns affecting communities and their food security. Situations of poverty are closely linked to food insecurity. Gaining access to adequate and nutritious food is a challenge across most of the country, with women and children in rural areas faring worst.

The Special Rapporteur observed that the

current dual land tenure system in Zambia lacks certain protection mechanisms to secure access to land for smallholder farmers. The government's policy to turn export-oriented large-scale commercial agriculture into a driving engine of the economy, in a situation where land protection is weak, risks pushing peasants off their land. This will force them out of production, impacting severely on people's right to food. The effect of such policies is particularly worrying, considering that smallholder farmers account for almost 60 per cent of the population and are dependent on land for their livelihoods; at the same time, they feed about 90 per cent of the Zambian population.

The Special Rapporteur said the main groups requiring special attention are women and agricultural workers, including child labourers and people living in refugee camps. She noted that because gender discrimination is pervasive in Zambia, women have limited opportunities to have access to land, education, credit and other productive assets, which creates a power imbalance preventing women and girls from taking full control of their lives.

It was noted too that the poorest and most vulnerable people in rural Zambia tend to be agricultural workers, who work for less than \$2 a day on other people's farms. Such low wages, combined with the labourers' consequent

inability to work on their own farms, leave them trapped in intergenerational cycles of poverty.

The Special Rapporteur also observed that, despite its own high levels of poverty, Zambia has shown commendable hospitality in hosting refugees; nevertheless, there is room for improvement.

The Special Rapporteur recommends accordingly that Zambia

- improve the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the institutional, legal and legislative framework with regard to adequate strategies and programmes on food and nutritional security and the right to rural development, and support women farmers with additional incentives, access to credit, and other agricultural resources;
- take urgent measures to address the root causes of child labour in the agricultural sector; and
- implement international standards in national laws that guarantee refugees and asylum seekers the rights to seek work, to have access to health care and education, and to enjoy freedom of movement.

In order for the country meet its human rights obligations, especially the right to food, the Special Rapporteur made several further recommendations:

- Zambia should prepare and adopt a human rights-based national framework law on the right to food, with effective benchmarks and implementation plans for each region. The framework should include a financial structure that contains the necessary budgetary and taxation measures for supporting smallholder farmers as well as gender-sensitive budgeting. It should protect the long-term sustainability of agricultural production; establish authorities and agencies responsible for implementation; provide for proper supervision and



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accountability mechanisms to promote the full and active participation of all interested parties, including those most vulnerable; and enact impending legislation, including laws on social protection.

- Zambia should continue to support small-scale food producers, particularly women and young people, and increase incomes by ensuring fair access to land and other productive resources.
- Zambia should extend the coverage of school meals to cover 100 per cent of children, giving priority to rural areas, and adopt a simplified system for purchasing agricultural produce from family farms and local producers.

References

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to food on her mission to Zambia, UN Doc. A/HRC/37/61/Add.1 (25 January 2018). Available at <https://bit.ly/2EZU0AR>