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Joint written statement* submitted by FoodFirst International Action Network (FIAN),
a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2003]

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The right to food in Brazil

The Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Commission on the right to adequate food, Jean Ziegler, was in Brazil from the 1st to the 18th of March, 2002, for an official visit with the objective of preparing a report on food rights. The preliminary report, presented last year at the United Nations General Assembly, established the parameters of his research in various countries as being a means to expose "the urgent necessity to eradicate hunger and malnutrition." His visit and his findings are strongly supported and endorsed by a huge number of non-governmental organisations in Brasil. His report is describing the problems in the country. Moreover we would like to support is general findings and methodology concerning the right to food, because it is adequate from a Brazilian perspective to deal with the relevant problems:

The principal international norm regarding the Right to Food is contained in the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In accordance with these norms, hunger must be eliminated and people given access to permanent adequate and quality food supplies, guaranteeing physical and mental health of individuals and communities, as well as a dignified life.

According to the Special Rapporteur, hunger can be described inter alia as the lack or insufficiency of calories in the body. Malnutrition is characterized by the lack of nutrients, especially vitamins and minerals. While varying in language, Food Security is defined by the United Nations in the following manner: new-born babies need 300 calories per day; children between the ages of one and two need 1,000 calories per day; children over 5 years old should consume 600 calories per day. Adults should consume between 2,000 and 2,700 per day. According to UNICEF, malnutrition in children under five years old can have life-long side effects.

Unemployment is one of the causes for hunger and malnutrition. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), close to one billion people do not have employment that can adequately provide for their basic nutritional necessities. Despite various studies showing that it is possible to produce enough food for global consumption, 826 million people continue to suffer chronic malnutrition. Each year, 36 million people die of hunger. The special envoy characterizes this situation as a "*silent genocide*."

The right to food must be guaranteed even in cases of armed conflict. The Geneva Convention prohibits the destruction of crop lands and sources of potable water, even in war-time situations.

Another important aspect of Mr. Ziegler's work is researching the world population's access to clean drinking water. He calls attention to the fact that more than one billion people do not have access to running water; close to 2.4 billion people do not possess basic sanitation, and 2.2 million people die each year of diarrhea, the majority of whom are children. Water is an indispensable natural resource. If the current destruction of natural sources of water continues, one half of the world's population will be without access to potable water in only 25 years.

In accordance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), States are obligated to "respect, protect, and guarantee" the right to food. Respecting this right means that the State cannot interfere with the population's access to adequate food. The Special Rapporteur cites various examples, such as the eviction of rural workers from their land, especially those who depend on agriculture for subsistence. The Convention also prohibits the use of toxic substances in the production of food.

Beyond this, the ICESCR establishes the principals of non-regression and non-discrimination in relation to the approval of laws guaranteeing access to food. This means that governments should not approve laws that hinder social organization around this subject. On the contrary, governments should facilitate social organization around access to land, work, and for the protection of the environment. States must guarantee the universal right to food through concrete measures that protect vulnerable social groups and support the necessary means for people to feed themselves.

The preliminary report of Jean Ziegler criticizes macroeconomic policies that favor large multinational corporations, especially those of the World Trade Organization (WTO). He cites the studies of non-government organizations, such as FIAN (Food First Information and Action Network), that expose the dangers that fast and unregulated liberalization of world trade represents can have for the ability of states to implement their human rights obligations from the ICESCR. These policies favor the production of food for export, to the detriment of food production for the internal market.

The Rapporteurs recommended that the priority of governments should be to help small farmers, who are responsible for the majority of food production for internal consumption. He condemns the monopoly of large agro-business as a risk to food sovereignty, principally in Third World countries.

The criteria of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights demand positive steps toward eliminating world hunger. While we are far from an ideal situation, the economic model adopted by the majority of Third World countries indicates a tendency contrary to the norms established by the United Nations and, in theory, approved by our governments.

In general the work of the Special Rapporteur was useful, particularly his country mission. We therefore urge the members of the Human Rights Commission to prolong the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate food.
