



The Hague Institute
for Global Justice

The Hague Dialogue

The Right to Food: International Peace and Justice and the Role of Cities

24 September 2015

Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia Leonardo da Vinci
Milan, Italy

SUMMARY OF THE ROUNDTABLE ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD

On 24 September 2015, The Hague Institute convened, in close collaboration with the City of The Hague, a roundtable dialogue on 'The right to food'. This dialogue took place in the Leonardo da Vinci Museum in Milan, as part of the Milan Expo. The aim of the dialogue was to develop a concrete agenda for realizing the right to food in the context of international peace and justice, with a special focus on the role of cities. The dialogue used three lenses to identify the key challenges as well as concrete steps that can be taken to realize the right to food. These lenses are: rule of law, conflict prevention and global governance. Four keynote speakers provided short overviews of the challenges and opportunities within their field of expertise with regard to the right to food.

Presentation 1. How Can Accountability for Violations of the Right to Food be Ensured?

By Ms. Sonja Biserko, Founder and President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, and Member of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Ms. Sonja Biserko presented, based on her extensive experience, the role of international fact-finders and courts in preventing, deterring and providing justice to victims of starvation. These insights specifically focused on the role of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. A rule of law-based approach to food imposes primary obligations on states regarding inter alia equitable distribution and provision of access to food. Moreover, under the UN Guiding Principles of Human Rights and Businesses, non-state actors like private enterprises have responsibilities in relation to the right to food. One specific set of obligations and responsibilities stems from the prohibition of the use of deliberate deprivation of food, starvation, as an international crime. Such crimes include genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Presentation 2. How Can Seed Rights Strengthen the International Right to Food Framework?

By Dr. Ir. Niels Louwaars, Director, Plantum Netherlands

Mr Niels Louwaars underscored that food security starts with seeds. Some decades ago a general consensus was that local farmers' varieties were optimally adapted to the local environment. Now we know that climate change challenges this perception: the resilience that the genetic diversity of farmers' varieties has may not be enough to cope with the environmental changes. Plant breeding support is also needed for these farmers. Through various techniques, over the last century new seed varieties have been developed. Seed companies improving seed varieties through genetic modification introduced a new phenomenon of patenting of gene related plant traits. At this moment different rights relate to plant breeding and seed production. However, through the patenting of these new technologies, issues of access to seeds and the consequences of monocropping has become extremely urgent for the food security of many farmers in developing countries as well as the world leading Dutch seed sector.

Presentation 3. The Role of Food Insecurity in Violent Conflict

By Mr. Chris Arsenault, Reporter on global food security and agricultural politics, Thomson Reuters

Mr. Chris Arsenault showed that the relation between conflict and food insecurity is complex and multi-causal. Food insecurity can both result from and contribute to armed conflict (as for example in Somalia). Certain grievances, such as lack of guaranteed access to land and water for food production might exacerbate food insecurity and contribute to social unrest and conflict. Food security holds a qualitative aspect as well. Access to nutritious food and a balanced diet relates to the availability of water, fertile soils but to a diversity of seeds as well. Climate change could even further increase the competition for natural resources. These challenges raise the question on what the international community could and should do (ethics and norms) in both preventing these conflicts as well as preventing their recurrence.

Presentation 4. Local Perspectives on the Right to Food

Mr. José Luis Vivero Pol, former Food Security Officer at Food and Agriculture Organization, Researcher at University of Louvain

Mr. Jose Luis Vivero Pol showed how Latin America is at the forefront of including the right to food in the constitution. However, only a few countries are funding right to food related activities. Despite a number of initiatives, the right to food has not been taken up by the EU member states. There are however a number of conceptual and operational paradigms which need to be addressed before the right to food can be operationalized. Overlooking the issues, there appears to be a rural-urban disconnect; a disconnect between what is done nationally and what should be done at the local level (accountability), as well as the lack of possibilities for the local level to participate in the decision-making processes which are influencing their livelihoods. As such cities can play a role in uniting and connecting the different groups.

Summary of the debates during the day

The conflict prevention lens:

1. Empowerment through education (specifically on democratic principles) is essential to strengthen the right to food as well as to prevent conflict from arising.

2. The analysis and monitoring of ‘big data’ using advanced methods is an important step in locating the eruption of potential conflicts due to food insecurity.
3. Political will at all levels is essential to realize the right to food.

The rule of law lens:

1. All rights come with obligations; therefore we need strong institutions that can provide the essential checks and balances.
2. A coherent legal framework is needed: the law is a necessary condition but not sufficient.
3. There is a need for public interest litigation in realizing the right to food.
4. Fact-finders, like the special rapporteur or the commission of inquiry on human rights in North Korea, are extremely important in monitoring progress and raising awareness on outstanding problems.
5. Legal literacy of stakeholders from the local to national levels is fundamental to all progress.

The global governance lens:

1. During the last week of September 2015, global consensus was reached on the sustainable development goals during the SDG summit New York. If we want to move forward on the right to food, it is critical to coherently work on goals 2, 11, 16 and 17.
2. Cities can play an important role in the sustainable development agenda by actively connecting national and local levels, by connecting rural and urban needs, and by bringing the different disciplines together to work on a holistic approach to food security.

Final remarks

As it is the case with so many current and complex world problems, an interdisciplinary approach to solve them is required. This approach is at the heart of how The Hague Institute for Global Justice operationalizes its mandate as a ‘think and do’ tank. We therefore look forward to convening, in close collaboration with the City of The Hague, the key stakeholders and converting the outcomes of the Roundtable into substantive actions.

With this mind and moving forward, The Hague Institute is currently finalizing the agenda developed during the roundtable with actions to be taken in the short- and long-term. Until the end of 2015, The Hague Institute will pursue its role as convener and center for innovative research by organizing various expert meetings furthering the study of this field of expertise, supporting our partners’ mission in promoting the Right to Food with our expert contributions, and partnering with key organizations currently working on this issue in The Hague, including The City of The Hague, Museon and IDLO.

List of Participants

- Marta Antonelli, Roma Tre University
- Chris Arsenault, Thomson Reuters
- Sonja Biserko, United Nations Human Rights Committee

- Tom Buitelaar, The Hague Institute for Global Justice
- Andrea Calori, Està - Economia e Sostenibilità
- Elena Madalina Ciocanel, Consulate General of Romania in Milan
- Piero Confalonieri, Terra Nuova
- Jill Coster van Voorhout, The Hague Institute for Global Justice
- Fabianode Andrade Correa, International Development Law Organization - IDLO
- Rens de Man, The Hague Institute for Global Justice
- David de Waal, Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Tomaso Ferrando, Sciences Po Law School Paris
- Sharon Janmaat, City of Rotterdam
- Niels Louwaars, Plantum Netherlands
- Antje Melissen, Stichting World Expo Milaan 2015
- Paolo Monti, UCSC ExpoLAB
- Maarten Okkersen, Museon the Hague
- Alessandro Pirani, Milan Center of Food Law and Policy
- Evert-Jan Quak, Food & Business Knowledge Platform / The Broker
- Pietro Raitano, Altreconomia
- Raffaella Scalisi, City of Milan
- Roberto Sensi, ActionAid Italy
- Jaap Smit, Province South Holland
- Marsha Tatipikalawan, Communitative Consultancy
- Nick van den Berg, City of Rotterdam
- Marie-Christine van der Sman, Museon the Hague
- Karin van Rooyen, Stichting World Expo Milan 2015
- Mark Verheul, City of the Hague
- José Luis Vivero Pol, University of Louvain
- Abi Williams, The Hague Institute for Global Justice