



**Sixth Report of Canada
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,
2005-2009**

The Human Right to Food to Adequate Food

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Assessment

The Right to Food is a central component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living (Article 11). Yet *Canada's Sixth Report* documenting Federal and Provincial government compliance with the *ICESCR* between 2005-2009 provides an inadequate and seriously flawed evaluation of the State's record in meeting its obligations to ensure the progressive realization of the Human Right to Adequate Food (see *ICESCR*, 1976; *UN General Comment 12*, 1999; and the *Voluntary Guidelines*, UNFAO 2004).

Our reasons are as follows:

(1) Parts 1 and 11 of the report which focus on the role of the Government of Canada acting in compliance with the *ICESCR* provide no mention of the Right to Food (see Article 11), nor of 'food security' or 'food insecurity'. It is as if the problem of domestic hunger does not exist. This indicates either ignorance of, or indifference to the issues.

#This is a regrettable omission in light of the fact that:

- in 1998 *Canada's Action Plan for Food Security* (AA-FC, 1998) declares the **Right to Food** (see Enabling Environment) and poverty reduction and food insecurity (see Access to Food), as primary commitments informing a national food policy;
- in 1999 *General Comment 12* (CESCR) clarified the meaning and intent of the Right to Adequate Food;
- and in 2004 the *Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the*

right to adequate food in the context of national food security (UN FAO) were adopted by the FAO Council in 2004 (127 Session).

Why then is there no recognition in *Canada's Sixth Report* by the Federal Government of these significant national and international commitments?

#Likewise it is regrettable that there is no mention of the Household Food Security Module in the annual *Canadian Community Health Survey* dating from 2005 (see Tarasuk et al, 2014). This is ironic given that this official national survey, collecting and measuring food insecurity data across the country is entirely in keeping with Canada's international and domestic **Right to Food** obligations. It is a feather in our national cap!

#Indeed without such indicators and measurement it is not possible to assess the degree to which the Federal and Provincial governments are acting in compliance with the *ICESCR* in the progressive realization of the **Right to Food**. Lacking such tools it is not possible to develop evidence based food, income security, public health and social policy for addressing domestic hunger and food insecurity.

#Whilst it is correct that Parts 1 and 11 of the report reference issues, measures and actions (albeit in disjointed ways) relating to the economy, the recession, employment, federal transfers, health care, housing, homelessness, minimum wages, Aboriginal peoples, social security and the right to an adequate standard of living there is no link to, or mention of food insecurity or specific rights-based measures to address it.

#Furthermore, the Report is silent on the question of the Government of Canada, as 'primary duty bearer' to '*respect, protect and fulfill*' the **Right to Food** including establishing national indicators and the setting of goals, benchmarks, targets and timeliness aimed at the reduction of food insecurity and poverty and the achievement food security for all, particularly for vulnerable populations (See Ziegler *et al*, 2011; Riches & Silvasti, eds, 2014)

(2) Parts 111 and IV of the Report include measures claimed by the Provincial and Territorial Governments to implement the Right to the Food. However the Right to Food is only fleetingly referenced by six of the ten provinces (including Quebec, excluding Ontario), and by two of the three Territories (Yukon and NWT) with food (in)security only mentioned by four provinces (BC, Manitoba, Quebec and PEI).

#Whilst provincial reporting is a slight improvement compared to the silence of the Federal Government, this limited acknowledgement of the **Right to Food** again indicates a general ignorance or lack of concern regarding food insecurity and the issue of food access. It indicates a lack of knowledge and clear understanding of the **Right to Food** (see UN General Comment 12; Ziegler et al. ...) and of the widespread prevalence of food insecurity across the Canada (see Tarasuk, *et al*, 2014).

#**Right to Food**: Six provinces – BC, Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec, PEI and Newfoundland refer to: increasing the social assistance support allowance for food, clothing and shelter in 2007 (BC – has not been raised since); raising income support benefits (AB); food

safety, northern healthy foods, school meal project and northern agriculture (Man); healthy lifestyles and Action Plan to combat Poverty and Social Exclusion (Quebec); healthy eating strategies (PEI); Air-food Lift subsidy for coastal communities (NFL); increasing social assistance (Yukon); and a *Food Donation Act*; support for market oriented agriculture and nutrition advice and coordination (NWT).

#Food (in)security and/or social assistance increases are specifically referenced in relation to the **Right to Social Security** (AB; Sask); student nutrition programs (Ont); Quebec's Action Plan and PEI's healthy eating strategy.

#Whilst the Provinces reference the **Right to Social Security** and the **Right to an Adequate Standard of Living** including, for example, poverty reduction, homelessness, minimum wages, social assistance and nutrition and healthy eating programs neither they nor the Federal Government connect the policy dots addressing a comprehensive rights-based strategy directed at poverty reduction and achieving national food security.

#What is equally dispiriting is that despite the findings of the Canadian Community Health Surveys that between 2005-2009 high levels of food insecurity either remained stable or increased in the majority of provinces (Tarasuk, et al, 2014), no reference is made by any province to this data. It was ignored basis for informing evidence-based food, income, public health and social policy.

#What is evident is that Canada, during this time (largely continuing to the present) , lacked knowledge at both the provincial and federal levels of the full meaning and intent of the **Right to Food** and its application to public policy.

(3) The short comings of Canada's Sixth Periodic Review regarding the progressive realization of the Right to Food (ICESCR, 1976; General Comment 12, 1999; VG,s 2004) are made clear in the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur following his mission to Canada in May, 2012 (OHCHR, 2012).

#Specifically, Dr. Olivier De Schutter's recommendations propose that Canada should:

- formulate a comprehensive rights based national food strategy;
- revise social assistance levels to correspond to the costs of basic necessities required to enjoy the human right to an adequate standard of living;
- set the minimum wage as a living wage;
- accord status to those Aboriginal people unrecognized as such under the Indian Act in relation to land and water rights, and to other aspects of food security.....

#among his recommendations he also points to the need for Canada to recognize

- access to sufficient and adequate food as a legal entitlement;
- the right to food as an important tool for combating hunger and malnutrition;
- the State as the 'primary duty bearer' and the obligations the Right to Food imposes on governments;
- the importance of identifying the hungry by adequate food insecurity and

vulnerability mapping.

(4) Conclusion and Recommendations

- **In light of the absence of an informed understanding of a Right to Food analysis in Canada's Sixth Report (Parts 1-1V) it is most unlikely that the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights will be able to evaluate the extent to which the provinces, let alone the Government of Canada, during the period 2005-2009 acted in compliance with their domestic Right to Food obligations in addressing domestic hunger and food insecurity.**

Two recommendations to assist current and future deliberations

- **The UN Special Rapporteur's Report (HCHR, 2012) should be brought to the attention of the UN CESCR monitoring Committee when reviewing Canada's Sixth Report regarding its compliance with the ICESCR for the period 2005-2009.**
- **Capacity building: in light of the lack of informed attention in the *Sixth Report of Canada* (2005-2009) given to a Right to Food (ESCR) framework for analyzing and reporting on Canada's record in addressing domestic hunger and food insecurity, a Human Rights framework should be adopted – federally and provincially - in all future Periodic Reviews with the aim of clarifying and making transparent Canada's progress in realizing 'joined-up' food, income, public health and social policy directed at achieving food security for all.**

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Food Secure Canada is a national membership-based alliance of organizations and individuals concerned with zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and sustainable food systems.