3rd United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights, Geneva 1-3 December 2014

**Parallel Side Event on 2 December, 16.15-17.45**

***Does the World Need a Human Rights Based Convention on Healthy Diets?***

***Exploring the role of Food Corporations towards the Rights to Adequate Food and Health***

***Organized by the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights and its partners[[1]](#footnote-1)***

This side event is a partial follow-up to an international conference held at the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo, Norway, on September 11 and 12 this year, focusing on the role and impact of multinational corporations and other business enterprises in the food sector regarding the human right to adequate food and health and to adequate livelihoods (standard of living).

*Panel*

Asbjørn Eide, Prof. emer., Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo:

*Summary of the Oslo Conference and purpose of the present session*

Tim Lobstein, Director of Policy, World Obesity Federation, London:

*Introduction to the theme of the side event*

Francesco Branca, Director, Department of Nutrition for Health and Development, WHO:

*How did the Second International Conference on Nutrition deal with issues of relevance to the theme?*

Christoph Stückelberger, Director and Founder of Globethics.net and Prof of Ethics, Univ. of Basel:

 *Ethical perspectives on human rights in the food business sector*

General discussion

g

How and where food is produced, processed, distributed and accessed has implications for the health and livelihood of people, regardless of where they live. Food is necessary to live and is central to health and disease. The various food systems, or the infrastructure that enables the delivery of food from farm to mouth, can contribute to the health, economic and social well-being of communities, cities and regions. They can also generate unhealthy food habits and consumption giving rise to different forms of malnutrition, including the increasing prevalence of obesity and related non-communicable diseases now being observed all over the world.

The role of the multi/transnational food and beverage industry - positive or negative - cannot be overestimated, nor can that of smaller and medium-sized enterprises within the sector. Corporations are having an increasing impact on the determinants of the livelihood of producers and the health of consumers. In these contexts, their impacts on the human rights to adequate food and health need to be much better understood and addressed.

The Oslo Conference included prominent international experts in the fields of public health, social development and human rights, and had the following aims[[2]](#footnote-2):

* *To identify and discuss the human rights problems and concerns arising from some of the activities of the food related corporations involved in the production, processing and marketing of foods and drinks, and that may be in potential conflict with human health and livelihoods;*
* *To explore whether and to which extent legal and quasi-legal instruments, especially the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, can be used to (i) improve government regulations of corporate practices, and (ii) promote better respect for human rights by corporations (with focus on the right to an adequate standard of living/livelihood, and the rights to food and health);*
* *To prepare some general recommendations that can be used in advocacy in various fora and as support in research.*

The conference adopted a statement containing a set of recommendations which will be available at this side event[[3]](#footnote-3). Among the main ones of these were to strengthen and to ensure better implementation of already existing standards and to make progress in adopting new ones regarding (1) impacts on the livelihood of socially and economically vulnerable producers of food and landless workers; (2) harmful marketing of breast milk substitutes and (3) marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages, especially to children.

It is the third of these concerns that will be highlighted at this side event.

The following issues should be in focus:

* Can a human rights-based Convention on healthy diets, as launched at the World Health Assembly in May 2014[[4]](#footnote-4), be a positive contribution to this task?
* How did the recent Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2, held in Rome in November 2014) deal with the issue, and which controversies if any have emerged?
* Can the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights inform and inspire the formulation and process towards the adoption of such a convention?
* Can such a sector-oriented approach, with special focus on the food industry, be a positive contribution to the further development and application of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights?
* Can the initiation of negotiations regarding the proposed Convention generate conflicts between corporate interests and regulatory state legislations to protect consumers from unhealthy marketing practices regarding food products (especially to children)?
1. The partners here are the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law/ Research Group on Human Rights and Development, University of Oslo; the Interfaculty LEVE Network (Livelihoods in Developing Countries) and Department of Nutrition, Faculty of Medicine, also both at the University of Oslo, and the Oslo and Akershus University College for Applied Sciences. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The full programme of the Oslo conference and list of speakers are available on request. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Or see: <http://www.uio.no/english/research/interfaculty-research-areas/leve/news-events/news/2014/1022-corp-global-food-syst-conf-statement.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. By World Obesity Federation and Consumers International. See <http://www.worldobesity.org/site_media/uploads/healthydietspress.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)