



# The Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Adequate Food<sup>1</sup>

## Introductions

In November 2004, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) adopted the *[Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security](#)*<sup>2</sup> (hereinafter Right to Food or RtAF Guidelines). Initiated by civil society, negotiated in a collaborative process, and unanimously adopted by all FAO member states, the Right to Food Guidelines represented hope for a greater consensus on what States must do to fulfil their obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights to make the human right to adequate food and nutrition (RtAFN) a reality for people on the ground.

In the years since the Right to Food Guidelines were adopted, while some progress has been achieved in implementing the right to adequate food and nutrition, it arguably remains the most consistently violated human right across the globe. The Guidelines however continue to be a useful and valuable tool for the struggles and efforts of civil society organizations and social movements to hold governments accountable.

## Relevance and Contributions of the Right to Food Guidelines

- The Right to Food Guidelines were the first intergovernmental agreement on how to implement the RtAFN at the national level. Having been adopted unanimously by FAO members as a consensus document on how to implement the RtAFN, no State member of FAO can claim to be unaware of the Guidelines.
- They have helped increase the visibility and understanding of food as a human right, the obligations it places on States, the role rights-holders have, and the need for a holistic approach to food systems, based on the indivisibility of human rights. The Guidelines reiterate the interpretation of the RtAFN as outlined in the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment No. 12<sup>3</sup> and call for a multi-sectoral, holistic public policy approach.
- They have contributed to several advances at global and national level towards realizing the RtAFN. For example, a global process to introduce the RtAFN into national legal and policy frameworks was initiated with the adoption of the Right to Food Guidelines (e.g., the RtAFN has been institutionalized in the form of constitutional amendments and framework laws in many countries, including

<sup>1</sup> This Fact-Sheet is based on the sources listed below, primarily on the Watch 2014 articles and the CSO Synthesis Paper.

<sup>2</sup> "Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security". FAO, October 2014. Available in English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Russian and Nepalese at: [www.fao.org/docrep/009/y7937e/y7937e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/y7937e/y7937e00.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4538838c11.html>

- Mexico, South Africa and Brazil). At the global level, the Guidelines were essential in the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), and in the elaboration of documents such as the Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (GSF), and the revisited Comprehensive Framework for Action (CFA).
- The Right to Food Guidelines can be used as a useful monitoring and advocacy tool for civil society, as illustrated by the case study below.

### **Assessing Progress and Challenges Ahead on the 10-year Anniversary of the Guidelines**

2014 marked the 10-year anniversary of the adoption of the Right to Food Guidelines. On this occasion, civil society and social movements engaged in the promotion and defense of the human right to adequate food and nutrition, as well as food sovereignty. They embarked on a critical assessment paving the way to advance the human right to adequate food and nutrition. As a result of a broad civil society consultation process, facilitated by the [Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition](#), and with the political support of the member organizations of the [Civil Society Mechanism of the Committee on World Food Security](#) (CSM), a CSO synthesis paper was drafted.<sup>4</sup>

#### ***The Right to Food Guidelines as a monitoring tool for civil society: The example of Colombia***

FIAN Colombia, along with other human rights organizations, launched monitoring reports on the situation of the right to adequate food and nutrition in Colombia in 2008, 2010 and 2013.<sup>5</sup> These reports were methodologically structured to take advantage of a monitoring tool developed by FIAN International and Welthungerhilfe,<sup>6</sup> which aims to facilitate the monitoring of states' compliance with their legal obligations vis-a-vis the RtAFN on the basis of the *Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Adequate Food*. The reports have proved to be useful for international and national advocacy efforts. This is an example of how civil society is using the Right to Food Guidelines as a monitoring tool.

*For further information, please visit FIAN Colombia's website (in Spanish): [www.fiancolombia.org](http://www.fiancolombia.org).*

<sup>4</sup> "10 Years of the Right to Food Guidelines - Progress, Obstacles and the Way Ahead. Civil Society Synthesis Paper for the 41st Session of the UN Committee on World Food Security" (October 2014). Available in English, Spanish and French at: [www.fian.org/library/publication/detail/10\\_years\\_of\\_the\\_right\\_to\\_food\\_guidelines\\_progress\\_obstacles\\_and\\_the\\_way\\_ah\\_ead](http://www.fian.org/library/publication/detail/10_years_of_the_right_to_food_guidelines_progress_obstacles_and_the_way_ah_ead)

<sup>5</sup> A summary of the 2013 report is available at: [http://www.rtfn-watch.org/uploads/media/Watch\\_2014\\_Article\\_12\\_Colombia.pdf](http://www.rtfn-watch.org/uploads/media/Watch_2014_Article_12_Colombia.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> FIAN International, 2007, "Screen State Action against Hunger: How to Use the Voluntary Guidelines on the Right to Food to Monitor Public Policies", Heidelberg, November, available at: [http://www.fian.org/en/library/publication/detail/screen\\_state\\_action\\_against\\_hunger/](http://www.fian.org/en/library/publication/detail/screen_state_action_against_hunger/)

**Further References:**

- “Right to Food and Nutrition Watch 2014 - Ten Years of the Right to Food Guidelines: Gains, Concerns and Struggles”. FIAN International, ICCO, Bread for the World, October 2014. Available in English, Spanish and French at: [www.rfn-watch.org](http://www.rfn-watch.org)
- “The Right to Food: A People’s Struggle”. Video, October 2014. Available in English, Spanish, French and German at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxTD7N3CiRg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxTD7N3CiRg)
- “The Right to Food: Past commitment, current obligation, further action for the future. A Ten-Year Retrospective on the Right to Food Guidelines”. FAO, October 2014. Available at: [www.fao.org/fsnforum/sites/default/files/files/106\\_RightToFood/RTF\\_Synthesis\\_Report.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/sites/default/files/files/106_RightToFood/RTF_Synthesis_Report.pdf)