

## MEDIA RELEASE

### UN Human Rights Expert Puts Spotlight Back on Controversial Canada-Colombia FTA

Ottawa, May 14, 2012. Olivier De Schutter, a renowned human rights expert and the UN special Rapporteur for the Right to Food, will discuss human rights and trade and investment treaties at a public event tonight -- a mere day before the Canadian government tables its first human rights impact report of the controversial Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

De Schutter elaborated the *UN Guiding Principles on Human Rights Impact Assessments for Trade and Investment Agreements*. He will speak about how human rights impact assessments, if carried out properly, can ensure that FTAs do not exacerbate existing human rights abuses in countries such as Colombia.

Other renowned civil society and academic experts, such as Jennifer Moore from MiningWatch Canada, Alex Neve from Amnesty International and Lucie Lamarche from the University of Ottawa's Human Rights Research and Education Centre, will also comment at Monday's event.

The Canada-Colombia FTA generated widespread concern when negotiations were launched in 2007, given the ongoing human rights crisis in the South American country. It was feared the FTA would increase and protect the kinds of investment that are most associated with militarization, violence and forced displacement in Colombia, such as gold, oil, and plantations for biofuel.

Colombia recently surpassed Sudan as the country with the highest rate of internal displacement in the world. More than 259,000 people were forced to flee their homes and land in 2011 alone, with the total number of displaced people now estimated to be as high as 5 million. Displacement is often fuelled by struggles over land for lucrative projects. Colombia is also the most dangerous country on earth for trade union organizers, home to 49 of the 90 trade unionists murdered worldwide in 2010. The Colombian Constitutional Court has concluded that at least one third of Indigenous nations in Colombia face an imminent threat of extinction as a consequence of forced displacement and other human rights violations.

In 2008, the Standing Committee on International Trade (CIIT) recommended that Canada refrain from signing an FTA with Colombia until an independent, impartial and comprehensive human rights impact assessment had been conducted. Instead, the Canadian government committed to producing a yearly human rights impact report after the deal came into force. The first such report must be tabled in Parliament on May 15, 2012. Civil society organizations are concerned that this post-FTA human rights impact report runs the risk of glossing over realities on the ground, since the government is evaluating itself rather than having an independent expert do so. Also lacking is a mechanism to oblige action to address any problems that are identified in the report and prevent human rights violations in the future.

Monday's event will take place in the context of Mr. De Schutter's mission to investigate the right to food in Canada. He will be available to offer opinions to the media at the end of his official mission on May 16<sup>th</sup>. The other commentators at Monday's event will be available to take questions from the media immediately.

**Event details:**

*Trade and its Impact on Human Rights: Spotlight on the Canada-Colombia FTA*  
Monday, May 14, 2012 - 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm  
Tabaret Hall, Room 083, University of Ottawa  
Light refreshments will be served  
RSVP: [HRREC@uottawa.ca](mailto:HRREC@uottawa.ca)

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The Canadian Council for International Cooperation's Americas Policy Group has prepared a [briefing note](#) on what to look for in the government's human rights impact report. It has also been associated with a team of Colombian researchers and civil society organizations who are collecting baseline data that will offer benchmarks for assessing the impact of the trade agreement. The study will be available shortly.

**For more information, contact:**

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