

UN expert urges countries to give access to justice to people living in poverty



Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights Magdalena Sepúlveda. UN Photo/M. Garten

3 September 2012 – A United Nations independent expert today urged Member States to commit themselves to improve access to justice for the poor, adding that it is a crucial human right that is key to combat poverty.

“The rule of law is meaningless for people living in poverty without effective access to justice, which is a human right in itself, and essential for tackling poverty,” said the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, Magdalena Sepúlveda.

“Concrete actions must be taken to ensure that all individuals are empowered to claim their rights, demand effective remedies and accountability,” Ms. Sepúlveda said. “Without this, we are

left with a two-tier rule of law: a reality for the privileged, but only rhetorical for the poor and excluded.”

In a proposal to Member States, whose representatives will meet at a high-level meeting on the rule of law on 24 September, Ms. Sepúlveda called on countries to “ensure that poverty is never a barrier to enjoying the benefits of the rule of law” and to make concrete pledges to improve access to justice by the poorest and most marginalized in their societies.

The high-level meeting, she said, would provide a platform “to turn our vision for more inclusive and equitable societies into reality.” Ms. Sepúlveda also welcomed the inclusion of a specific section on access to justice in the outcome document currently being negotiated by States before the meeting, and made recommendations to strengthen its content before the document is adopted by the General Assembly.

Ms. Sepúlveda will present her report examining the obstacles to access justice faced by persons living in poverty to the General Assembly next month.

Independent experts, or special rapporteurs like Ms. Sepúlveda, are appointed by the Geneva-based Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a country situation or a specific human rights theme. They work in an independent and unpaid capacity.

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