



The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, Magdalena Sepúlveda, called on States to take immediate measures to ensure access to justice by the poorest segments of society, on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

"Access to justice is a human right in itself, and essential for tackling the root causes of poverty," said Ms. Sepúlveda today, urging States to improve such access for the poor as a core part of their efforts to fight poverty.

"Without access to justice, people living in poverty are unable to claim and realize a whole range of human rights, or challenge crimes, abuses or violations committed against them," Ms. Sepúlveda stressed.

People living in poverty face serious obstacles to accessing justice systems – including financial, social and physical barriers – which perpetuate and exacerbate their disadvantage.

"People living in poverty are often prevented from seeking justice due to the cost and time of travel to a distant courthouse, fees charged for filing claims or lack of free, quality legal assistance," the Special Rapporteur said. "The poor may be denied legal standing to file a claim because they do not have an official birth certificate."

"Lack of information about their rights, illiteracy or linguistic barriers, coupled with entrenched stigma attached to poverty, also makes it harder for the poor to engage with the justice system.

In such circumstances, a person living in poverty cannot uphold their rights or challenge injustice," she stressed.

Ms. Sepúlveda noted that even mature democracies struggle to ensure de facto equal access to justice by those living in poverty. "It is crucial to construct an inclusive justice system that is close to the people, both socially and geographically," the independent expert said.

"Ensuring access to justice for the poor requires well-functioning judicial systems and laws that do not solely reflect the interests of wealthy and more powerful groups but also take into account income and power imbalances," she said. "Reforms must be implemented with the effective and meaningful participation of persons living in poverty."

Ms. Sepúlveda emphasized that women living in poverty face particular difficulties in access to justice, and this is a major cause of their greater vulnerability to poverty. In her view, "efforts to tackle poverty must include empowering women to seek justice, and ensuring that the justice system does not discriminate against them."

"On the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, I wish to remind States and others that efforts to end poverty must be multi-dimensional and sustainable. Improving access to justice is a crucial part of any strategy," concluded Ms. Sepúlveda.

The Special Rapporteur's 2012 report to the General Assembly, to be presented on 30 October 2012, examines the obstacles that persons living in poverty face in accessing justice.

#### **Additional links:**

- [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR) 



- Magdalena Sepúlveda was appointed as the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights in May 2008 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. She is independent

from any government or organization.

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- Special Rapporteur’s “ [Guiding Principles on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty](#) ”

The Guiding Principles are also available in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx>

- Check the [Universal Human Rights Index](#)