

UCLouvain's Olivier De Schutter becomes United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

IN BRIEF:

- On 1 May UCLouvain Professor **Olivier De Schutter** becomes **United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights**
- His priorities: **social protection** for all; a **just transition**; and **involving people** living in poverty in implementing solutions

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On 1 May, **UCLouvain Professor Olivier De Schutter** begins a mandate as **United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights**. The professor of international law served two consecutive terms as United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food, from 2008 to 2014.

Prof. De Schutter begins his mandate in the midst of the **Covid-19 crisis**: *'This will worsen extreme poverty by 40%. The situation is dramatic but it's, at the same time, an opportunity to get the attention of governments.'*

Given the context of the crisis, UCLouvain's Prof. De Schutter will focus his efforts on **three priorities**:

- **Social protection for all.** Currently, 55% of the world's population, or **four billion people, have no social protection** and only 29% of people are covered throughout their lives. According to Prof. De Schutter, *'the cost of financing social protection for the 57 low-income and lower middle-income countries would average 4.2% of their GDP. This is an affordable amount that should be considered an investment in the future, not a cost.'*
- **Promote a just transition.** Olivier De Schutter hopes that the coming economic recession will be used to reflect on our desired development model. This must **allow for a reduction in inequality** and prevent transgression of planetary boundaries. We must not make a choice between growth and the fight against poverty: *'sustainable growth must go hand in hand with poverty reduction.'* To achieve this, *'It is necessary to strengthen the social and solidarity economy, support citizen initiatives based on the idea of the commons, and increase investment in renewable energy sources, insulating buildings, public transport, agroecological agriculture, and local food systems and the circular economy.'*
- **Involve people experiencing poverty.** *'By depriving ourselves of the voice of the people concerned, we're depriving ourselves of new solutions,'* Prof. De Schutter insists. He supports the idea that the knowledge of experts, professionals, and people experiencing poverty are complementary.

'UCLouvain is delighted with the appointment of Olivier De Schutter as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights,' Rector **Vincent Blondel** said. *'The university shares the vision of a transition to a model of sustainable development, and the fight against poverty and respect for human rights are fundamental pillars. UCLouvain has included the 17 sustainable development objectives among the priorities to be implemented through its missions. This concerns both its own organisation and the actions it carries out through teaching, research, and serving society.'*