

Sufficiently flexible and protective

This is the text of the statement made by ICSF to the Committee on the Fishing Sector at the 93rd Session of the International Labour Conference

1. The proposed Convention and Recommendation contained in Report V (2B) concerning work in the fishing sector go a long way in protecting and promoting rights of fishers to decent conditions of work. However, it falls short of promoting the rights of fishers who undertake commercial beach-seine operations, diving and gleaning that do not necessarily involve the use of any fishing vessels.
2. While commercial beach-seine operations are widespread in Asia and Africa, commercial shellfish gathering through diving and gleaning are common all over the world. The latter category also employs a large number of persons, including women. Extending provisions of health protection, medical care and social security to this category of persons, where reasonable and practicable, would do justice to women in fishing, in particular, and it will help the proposed Convention to meaningfully address fishing activities where women's participation is more important than that of men's. This would, however, require broadening the definition of a "fisher" in the proposed Convention also to include those employed in shore-based fishing operations who do not necessarily work on board any fishing vessel.
3. ICSF's consultations with artisanal and small-scale fishers' organizations in Africa, Asia and Latin America since the 92nd Session of the International Labour Conference 2004, demonstrate an overwhelming support for the inclusion of social security provisions in the proposed Convention, and it has been suggested that such provisions should extend to fishers irrespective of their sphere of fishing operation. It has been further proposed that these provisions should be no less than those included under the 1952 Minimum Standards for Social Security Convention (C.102).
4. The 26 December 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean that took an unprecedented toll of human lives, at least 300,000, including a large number of fishermen and women from coastal fishing communities, is a sad testimony to the urgent need for social security measures for small-scale fishers. Very few of the fishers who perished in the tsunami wave-surge in the affected countries came under any social security scheme.
5. Moreover, while welcoming the proposed degree of flexibility in relation to minimum age, medical examination, occupational safety and health and fishers' work agreement, the artisanal and small-scale fishers urge that the provisions for artisanal and small-scale fishing vessels undertaking international fishing voyages should be no different from those applicable to larger vessels undertaking such voyages.
6. As far as larger vessels are concerned, ICSF would like the proposed Work in Fishing Convention, 2005, to ensure that the protection afforded to fishers on board larger vessels by current ILO

instruments are at least retained, if not further improved. The ILO should make efforts to link up proposed labour standards with international instruments for fisheries management, particularly at the level of regional fisheries management organizations, and ensure that effective labour standards for crew on board larger fishing vessels are a pre-requisite for effective fisheries management, especially with regard to straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks.

7. Last but not least, ICSF would like to wish the Committee all success in its deliberations and would like to see a Convention sufficiently flexible and protective for artisanal and small-scale fishing, on the one hand, and adequately prescriptive for large-scale fishing operations, on the other.
8. We would also like to take this opportunity to announce a panel discussion on ILO Labour Standards for the Fishing Sector: A Small-Scale Fisheries Perspective that will be held on Tuesday, 14 June 2005 from 14.30 to 17.30 hrs at the John Knox International Center, 27 ch. des Crêts-de-Pregny, CH-1218, Grand-Saconnex, Genève, Suisse, Tel: 0041-22-747 0000. ICSF is

happy to invite all interested members of this Committee to the panel discussion where representatives of small-scale fishers from Africa, Asia and Latin America are expected to speak.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.



This Statement of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers was presented on 1 June 2005 to the Committee on the Fishing Sector at the 93rd Session of the International Labour Conference at Geneva