

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS**

---

**INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE ON THE CONDITIONS OF  
FISHWORKERS ON DISTANT WATER VESSELS**

31 August to 5 September 1992  
Baie du Tombeau, Mauritius

---

**SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS****Introduction**

In January 1991, the International Collective In Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) organized an international workshop on the conditions of fishworkers on distant water vessels (DWVs) in Manila, the Philippines. The papers presented at this workshop and the testimonies given by some victimized fishworkers revealed appalling conditions of work of migrant workers on board the Taiwanese vessels. The Animation Team of the ICSF that met soon after the workshop discussed the need for forming a mechanism to address effectively the question of recruitment, remuneration and working conditions of fishworkers aboard DWVs. As a result, a follow-up workshop was organized in Mauritius from 31 August to 5 September 1992.

The purpose of this workshop was to explore the need for a task force to go into issues related to the employment of fishworkers on DWVs, and if need be, to define its scope and lay down objectives.

The workshop was inaugurated by Cardinal Jean Margéot of Mauritius in the presence of Hon. M. Dulloo, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Natural Resources at the Centre Social M. Reine de la Paix, St. Louis. The participants devoted the rest of the day to visiting Albion Research Station under the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Natural Resources, and to meetings with

Accn No: 2208  
MFN No: 2200

representatives of fishworkers' and supporters' organizations such as APPIM, Seafarers' and Fishermen's Union, and Association des Femmes de Marins.

On Tuesday, 1 September 1992, the workshop began with a presentation of the Executive Secretary of the ICSF on the background and aims of the workshop. Ms Nenita Cura, Director, Family Center, Asian Social Institute, Manila, and member, Animation Team, ICSF provided a historical perspective on the involvement of the ICSF with the problems of fishworkers on DWVs. This was followed by a discussion where the participants expressed their expectations as to what the requisite mechanism for addressing the problems of fishworkers on DWVs ought to be.

The workshop was broadly divided into three parts. The first part was mainly a session on the status of fishworkers on industrial vessels and their problems. The testimonies of DWV fishworkers from Kenya, Mauritius, Madagascar and the Philippines were considered by the participants to gain a better understanding of these problems. The second part focused on the formation of an action programme on fishworkers aboard DWVs. Two groups were formed to facilitate a detailed discussion on the objectives of this workshop in the light of the testimonies of the fishworkers as well as the presentations made by the participants. It was decided that a task force be formed, and the third part suggested the terms of reference to act as a guideline for the task force.

It was decided to change *distant water* vessels to *industrial fishing* vessels (IFVs) in the terms of reference of the task force. For the purpose of a working definition, all vessels employing foreign labour from developing countries and/or engaged in joint ventures in developing countries and/or fishing in the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of their waters were included in the category of industrial fishing for this task force. Also included are vessels operating in national waters that are capable of fishing beyond the territorial waters (12 nautical miles) and employing at least five workers on board.

Following is a résumé of the important points that came up in the country reports.

#### Taiwan

The Taiwanese fishing industry is mainly controlled by 200 families which were formerly those of ordinary fishermen. Although the total number of IFVs have increased during the past five years, the participation of local labour has

declined considerably. This has made the industry dependent on foreign labour for the past quinquennium. While Taiwan employs workers from countries like Indonesia, South Africa, Mauritius, Burma, Thailand, Fiji, mainland China and the Philippines, the presentation by Gilberto Orioli of the Apostolate of the Sea and Massao Nikar of the Fishermen's Service Centre, Kao-hsiung focused mainly on the conditions of Filipino fishworkers in Taiwan.

The foreign workers are usually recruited by agents. The Filipinos, for example, are recruited principally by agents based in Singapore. There are about 15,000 illegal fishworkers. For a variety of reasons, the conditions of foreign fishworkers continue to be poor. The duration of work on board industrial vessels are really long, and workers are expected to put in at least sixteen hours of work per day in the fishing activity. Ignorance of the Chinese language, differences in rhythm of work, and physical punishment are additional reasons for the hardships of workers.

Furthermore, the contracts are often violated by the employers by tampering with the agreement. Since the workers are not furnished with a copy of the contract, they are unable to protest against this. The recruiting agents who are the intermediaries in the payment of salaries also cheat the foreign fishworkers often. The full salaries of foreign fishworkers are not directly paid for fear of desertion. They are also cheated by the banks in the exchange rate while sending money home. Extreme hardship, frustration with unfair treatment, and dreams of a better land-based job in Taiwan drive many workers to desert the fishing vessels.

Increasing recourse to employment of foreign labour, particularly from the mainland China, and increasing international pressure to improve the conditions of work have led to new legislation regulating the employment of foreign workers. The new legislation is expected to ensure the registration of foreign workers with the government in future.

There is no domestic public pressure on the government or on the private companies to improve the working conditions of foreign fishworkers. Nor is there any interest shown by the press in highlighting their plight. However, the Apostolate of the Sea in Kao-hsiung is planning an awareness campaign in Manila against the recruitment practices of unscrupulous agents with the help of some Philippine NGOs and the media. This has also received the support of the Vice President of the Philippines.

## **The Philippines**

Carlos Oda from the Apostolate of the Sea, Manila and Nenita Cura presented the case of the Filipinos working in Taiwan. However, they did not provide any information on the employment conditions of fishworkers in the Philippine IFVs.

The Philippines is an important supplier of cheap labour to the fishing industry, particularly to that of Taiwan. The discrimination against black workers in general in Taiwan and the perceived docility of the Filipinos are believed to be the factors that favour the Filipinos.

There is no proper legislation to protect the interests of the Filipino workers abroad, and the interest of the government is mainly in foreign exchange. The country already has a surplus of trained seafarers and sometimes the only way to acquire the specified experience for jobs on board merchant ships is by working on IFVs, and shipping agents often insist on such experience.

The presenters also noted that the Manila workshop of the ICSF has helped in arousing the interest of the government, NGOs and the people in the plight of the Filipinos in Taiwan.

## **Madagascar**

Until recently, Malagasy people were forbidden from working on foreign vessels. Gregoire Razafindratandra of the Apostolate of the Sea and Ramanoelina Rakotobozaka of SEKRIMA Union, in their presentation, observed that economic compulsions have been forcing the government to enter into agreements with foreign fishing companies. An agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC), for instance, allowing foreign vessels to continue fishing in their waters has been renewed. As a result, 42 tuna seiners and 80 long-liners have come to their waters. However, no information on these vessels vis-à-vis recruitment, remuneration and employment conditions of Malagasy workers was provided. There are no recruitment agencies so far and workers seem to be recruited directly by the company.

There are Malagasy workers on board the fishing vessels of South Africa, Greece, Taiwan, Mauritius, Reunion, and Honduras. Recruitment is undertaken directly by the companies often through tripartite negotiations involving the representatives of companies, maritime administration, and the seafarers'/ fishermen's organizations. Although the Malagasy law apparently protects the

Interests of their workers, the salaries on board foreign vessels are very poor. The clauses from a proposed agreement with a Mauritian fishing company, for example, revealed very poor remuneration of workers. Often there are long delays even in receiving this meagre amount.

### Reunion

The case of Reunion was presented by Alain Pagés, fisherman. Being an overseas territory of France, Reunion has adopted the French system of legislation. This provides for health insurance, social security, and retirement benefits to the fishworkers belonging to all categories. Although the law does not allow the employment of foreigners, there are instances of illegal recruitment from Madagascar and Mayotte in the industrial fishing activities, especially in longlining. The recent developments in the EEC, however, is a matter of concern for the local fishermen. The proposed fleet reduction in the EEC countries, they fear, would result in the deployment of European vessels in the underexploited oceans of the world. The Indian Ocean – "the most under developed ocean of the world" – could become an important <sup>action</sup> destiny for the redundant fleet from Europe, and the local fishermen are determined to fight any deployment in their region.

### Mauritius

Mauritian workers are employed mainly on board the local vessels. Regarding Mauritians employed on foreign vessels, the testimonies indicated that those employed in Taiwanese vessels are paid better than the South African and the Philippine fishworkers. However, conditions of work are deplorable, especially on the Taiwanese longliners, even for experienced Mauritian workers.

In their own country, the Mauritian workers enter into direct contractual agreements with the owners. According to a statement from the President, DWV Seafarers'/Fishermen's Association of Mauritius, read out by Jean Vacher of the Apostolate of the Sea, these contracts are alleged to be one-sided and superfluous, favouring **only the owners**. The use of old and derelict vessels, often bought second hand, is a matter of grave concern for the workers. There is no legislation to protect the rights of fishworkers, especially those on IFVs, and the statement emphasized the need for one. The recruitment of cheap labour from Madagascar to work on Mauritian vessels was also criticized in the statement.

## India

The presentation by A.J. Vijayan and Thomas Kocherry, National Fishworkers' Forum, focused on the status of Industrial fishworkers in India. The IFVs in India currently consist predominantly of trawlers, operating in very specific fishing grounds in the territorial waters for prawns and lobsters.

Workers are directly recruited by the owners, although agencies have also begun to recruit them for the emerging joint venture activities. The workers receive a salary and a share of the total catch in addition to one month's holiday in the deep sea prawn industry. If one takes the share of the catch that accrues to workers as an index of remuneration standards, it is the best among the countries represented in the workshop. Similarly, the working conditions also seem to be much better.

However, in the context of overfishing of deep water prawns and lobsters, the sustainability of remuneration standards is a matter of grave concern. No information was provided on the conditions of Indian workers in foreign vessels, although it was hinted that there is migration of fishing labour to countries in the Persian Gulf and Nigeria.

## Senegal

Allou Sall of CREDETIP and Co-ordinator, ICSF Animation Team presented the Senegalese case. The main problem seems to be that of workers who are paid low for their catch by mother ships belonging to foreign fleet, operating off the coast of Senegal, particularly to that of Korea. Detailed information on conditions of work, remuneration and recruitment were, however, not provided. The presentation also did not address the case of workers on Senegalese vessels.

## SALIENT ASPECTS OF THE COUNTRY REPORTS

Three scenarios were mainly illustrated by the presentations:

- (i) employment of domestic labour on domestic vessels,
- (ii) employment of foreign labour on domestic vessels, and
- (iii) employment of domestic labour on foreign vessels.

While the presentations of the participants from Mauritius, India, and Reunion focused on (i), those of the Philippines, Madagascar and Senegal focused on (iii). The presentation from Taiwan was the only one focusing on (ii).

It emerged from the presentations that, in the Indian and the Pacific oceans, the predominant tendency is that of IFVs of industrialized countries trying to maximize their profits by hiring cheap labour. In the fishing waters of industrialized or middle income countries, this takes the form of hiring cheap foreign labour; in the EEZs of poorer countries, this takes the form of joint ventures and licensing arrangements, under which foreign vessels exploit the rich waters and the poor local labour. Exceptions to this were India and Reunion, the cases of which will be discussed below.

In the case of foreign fishworkers on Taiwanese vessels, there is a need for more information on recruiting agents and the factors that prevent the owners from directly recruiting foreign workers. There is also the need for a concerted campaign, both in Taiwan and the labour-supplying countries, to highlight the oppressive working conditions on board the IFVs and the exploitative recruitment, employment, and remuneration of workers.

In the Philippines, it is important to collect information on conditions of work prevailing in their IFVs, as well as on the recruitment of workers and their remuneration. It may be worthwhile to explore the means of getting the seafarers' union - acknowledged to be one of the strongest unions in the South-East Asian region - interested in the question of workers on IFVs. Appropriate legislative measures, like the Thai laws, to protect the workers abroad are essential. Towards this end, a campaign among the senators and the public could be helpful. To educate potential job seekers in the Taiwanese vessels, literature describing the conditions of work aboard industrial vessels should be prepared and distributed, preferably through the Philippines Overseas Employment Agency (POEA). Mechanisms of working towards ensuring stricter labour recruitment through POEA also need to be explored.

In the case of Madagascar, the implications of joint ventures and licensing arrangements with the EEC countries for the interests of local labour as well as for the potential development of the local fishing industry are to be looked into.

In Mauritius, the tendency seems to be to employ cheap foreign labour on IFVs, as in the case of Taiwan, because of the growing reluctance of local workers to engage in industrial fishing.

Conditions of work, recruitment and remuneration seem to be the best in Reunion among the countries represented here. Considering the fairly high living and remuneration standards prevailing in this country vis-à-vis its neighbours like

Madagascar and Mauritius, it is unlikely to become a source of cheap labour, nevertheless, under favourable conditions it could become a base for EEC vessels in the Indian Ocean, particularly from France.

In India, the high remuneration standards set by the existing labour force on industrial fleet may protect to some extent the potential labour market from a raw deal in future. However, it has to be kept in mind that industrial fishing industry in India is built entirely on the international market for high value prawns and lobsters.

#### INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

James Smith from Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD) gave a presentation on various international organizations working on the issue of seafarers'/industrial fishworkers' rights. The International Transport-workers' Federation (ITF), an international coalition of trade unions, has a maritime division which formally represents the interests of industrial fishworkers in the Governing Body of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). For this reason, he suggested that it may be worthwhile to explore ways of interacting with this organization, although ITF is known for its bias towards industrial fishworkers from the developed countries. However, in the context of emerging joint ventures, licensing arrangements, flags of convenience, and fisheries agreements in the Indian Ocean, it may be possible to establish a meaningful dialogue, which eventually may enable fishworkers from developing countries to raise their grievances at the ILO.

It was suggested that the ICSF should take up with the ITF the issue of subsidies to European vessels by EEC to exploit the African, Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) countries' waters using cheap labour in the region. It was further suggested that the export of fish to the European market at rock bottom prices (thus pricing local produce out of the market in Europe as well as increasing pressure on ACP resources) should also be taken up with the ITF.

He also introduced the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA) as another organisation with whom ICSF could start communicating with for further information on conditions of fishworkers on industrial vessels and for campaigning against unfair employment and remuneration practices.



## FORMATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL TASK FORCE

In the light of

- oppressive and exploitative working conditions prevailing in general on board the industrial fishing vessels,
- nefarious recruitment and remuneration practices, and
- the increasing deployment of EEC vessels in the exclusive economic zone of ACP,

the meeting proposed the formation of an International task force.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE TASK FORCE

The objectives of this task force would be to:

- compile legislation and other legal documents on industrial fleet vis-à-vis recruitment, remuneration and conditions of work;
- document working conditions, study the recruitment pattern, and suggest campaign and action programmes regarding industrial fishworkers; and
- consolidate interaction and consider new linkages, where necessary, with organisations concerned with the rights of fishworkers (e.g. ITF, CCFD, Apostolat de la Mer, ICMA, and Centre for Seafarer Rights).

## MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE

The task force would comprise representatives from the Philippines, Mauritius, Taiwan, Seychelles, Reunion, South Africa, Madagascar, Senegal, India and Singapore, and would be for a period of two years. The members would be Nenita Cura and Carlos Oda (the Philippines), Gilberto Orioli and Masao Nikar (Taiwan), Gregoire Razafindratandra (Madagascar), Allou Sall (Senegal), A.J. Vijayan (India), Jean Vacher (Mauritius), and Alain Pagés (Reunion). The representatives for Seychelles, South Africa and Singapore would be identified later by Jean Vacher. He would also be the Co-ordinator of this task force.

## FUNCTIONING OF THE TASK FORCE

This task force would also be supported by regional task forces to be formed in Taiwan, the Philippines and Mauritius. The countries involved will take necessary steps to collect and furnish all legislative and related materials (including

government circulars, orders, judgements etc) with the Co-ordinator, with their analyses and suggestions. This should be completed within six months after the Initiation of the study. The ICSF Secretariat would circulate among the members of the task force a list of all the materials collected. Those Interested In obtaining material from this list may receive it from the Secretariat on request.

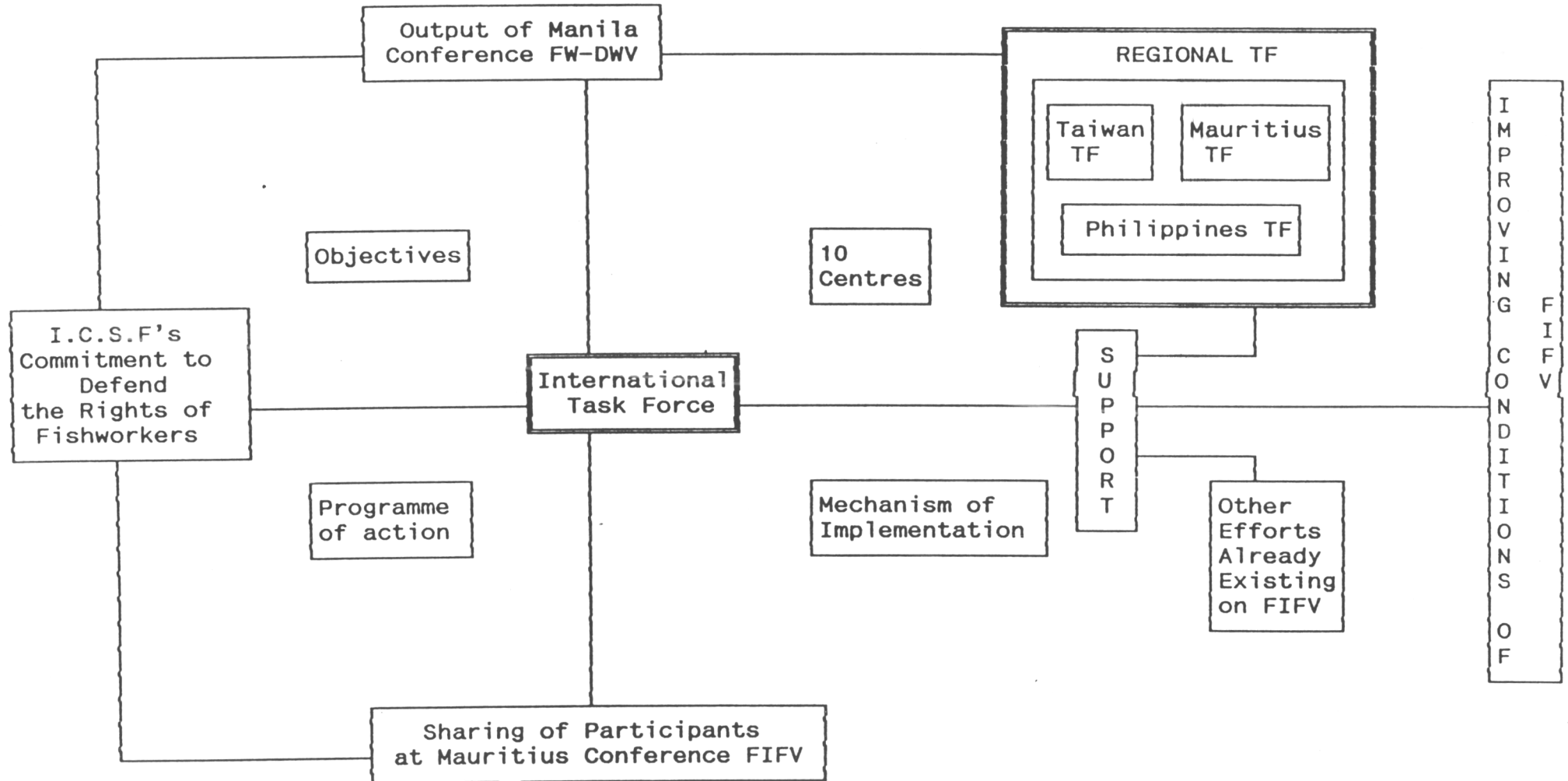
The members directly responsible to the Co-ordinator of the task force would be Nenita Cura, Gilberto Orioli, Gregoire Razafindratandra, Allou Sall, A.J. Vijayan, and Alain Pagés, in addition to the members to be Identified from Seychelles, South Africa and Singapore. Five out of the ten countries in the task force (to be identified later) would be visited by the Co-ordinator, if necessary. The study would be completed within two years and finalised after a meeting of the task force. The task force would become operational on official intimation to that effect from the ICSF Secretariat.

Sebastian Mathew  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

SM/pe

(taskfina.rep)

SYNTHESIS: TASK FORCE ON FISHWORKERS ON INDUSTRIAL FISHING VESSELS (FIFV)





---

**TASK FORCE ON THE CONDITIONS OF FISHWORKERS ON  
DISTANT WATER VESSELS**

**31 August to 5. September 1992  
Pension Arc-en-Ciel, Bale du Tombeau, Mauritius**

---

**Sunday, 30 August 1992**

- 17.00 - 19.00      Registration  
                         Introduction of participants  
                         Adoption of the Agenda
- 19.00                Dinner

**Monday, 31 August 1992**

- 09.30 - 10.30      Opening Ceremony at Centre Social M. Reine de la Paix  
                         Cardinal Jean Margéot  
                         and  
                         Hon. M. Dulloo, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and  
                         Natural Resources
- 10.45 - 14.00      Refreshments and Lunch
- 14.00 - 16.00      Visit to Ablon Research Station
- 16.30 - 19.00      Meetings with (i) APPIM, (ii) Seafarers' and Fishermen's  
                         Union, and (iii) Association des Femmes de Marins
- 19.30                Dinner

**Tuesday, 1 September 1992**

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 09.00 - 09.45 | ICSF In Retrospect - Sebastian Mathew                                      |
| 09.45 - 10.30 | ICSF Task Force on FWs on DWVs from a Historical Perspective - Nenita Cura |
| 10.30 - 11.00 | Tea  |
| 11.00 - 12.30 | Expectations of the participants about the Task Force.                     |
| 12.30 - 14.30 | Lunch  |
| 14.30 - 16.00 | Testimonies of DWV Fishworkers   |
| 16.00 - 16.30 | Tea  |
| 16.30 - 18.00 | Reflections of the Participants on the Testimonies of DWV fishworkers      |
| 19.30         | Dinner   |

**Wednesday, 2 September 1992**

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 09.00 - 10.30 | Sharing Experiences of the Employment Conditions of Fishworkers on DWVs - Asia and Africa<br>(Taiwan, The Philippines, Mauritius, Madagascar, Reunion, Senegal and India) |
| 10.30 - 11.00 | Tea   |
| 11.00 - 12.30 | Session continues   |
| 12.30 - 14.30 | Lunch   |
| 14.30 - 16.00 | Session continues   |
| 19.00 - 20.00 | Dinner  |
| 20.00         | Visit to Mount Sugar Estate   |

**Thursday, 3 September 1992**

- 09.00 - 10.30      Workshop - Formation of an Action Programme on FWs on DWVs
- 10.30 - 11.00      Tea
- 11.00 - 12.30      Session continues
- 12.30 - 14.30      Lunch
- 14.30 - 16.00      Presentation of Group Reports
- 16.00 - 18.00      Final Preparation of the Framework for the Action Programme
- 19.00              Dinner

**Friday, 4 September 1992**

- 09.00 - 10.30      Session continues
- 10.30 - 11.00      Tea
- 11.00 - 13.00      Synthesis of the meeting
- 13.00 - 14.00      Lunch
- 14.00 - 15.00      Visit to the Minister of Agriculture
- 15.00 - 18.30      Visit to a Fishing Village
- 19.00              Dinner

**Saturday, 5 September 1992**

- 09.00 - 10.30      Evaluation
- 10.30 - 11.00      Vote of Thanks
- 11.00 - 11.30      Tea

**TASK FORCE ON THE CONDITIONS OF FISHWORKERS ON  
DISTANT WATER VESSELS**

31 August to 5 September 1992, Mauritius

**Names and Addresses**

**Nenita CURA**

1518 Leon Guinto Street  
Malate, Manila, PHILIPPINES  
Tel: (632) 596266/595613  
Fax: (632) 5221095

**Robert FLEUROT**

Misereor Building  
3 rue d'Estaing  
Port-Louis, MAURITIUS  
Tel: (230) 2123910  
Fax: (230) 2086607

**Raymond GAUVRIT**

Apostolat de la Mer  
12 rue St. Georges  
Port-Louis, MAURITIUS  
Tel: (230) 2124237  
Fax: (230) 2086607

**Jacques HAREL**

Cathedrale St. Louis  
Port-Louis, MAURITIUS  
Tel: (230) 2084396  
Fax: (230) 2086607

**Thomas KOCHERRY**

Cherureshmi Centre, Valiathura  
Thiruvananthapuram-8, INDIA

**Sebastian MATHEW**

ICSF, 27 College Road  
Madras-6, INDIA  
Tel: (9144) 475303  
Fax: (9144) 8251145

**Masao NIKAR**

Fishermen's Service Centre  
24-1 Yukang Chong 2nd Road  
Chien Chen District Kao-hsiung  
TAIWAN  
Tel: (886) 78314875  
Fax: (886) 78416870

**Carlos ODA**

P.O. Box 2927, Manila, 1099  
PHILIPPINES  
Tel: (632) 485292/473914  
Fax: (632) 7228863

**Gilberto ORIOLI**

37 Lai Nan Street, Kao-hsiung  
TAIWAN  
Tel: (886) 75330239  
Fax: (886) 75322209

**Alain PAGES**

41 rue Dugain  
B.P. 12, Ste Suzanne 97441  
ILE DE LA REUNION  
Tel: (262) 470680

**Ramanoelina RAKOTOBOZAKA**

Apostolat de la Mer  
B.P. 180, Mahajanga (401)  
MADAGASCAR

**Grégoire RAZAFINDRATANDRA**

Apostolat de la Mer  
B.P. 98 Ampasimazava  
501 Toamasinea  
MADAGASCAR  
Tel: (2615) 32411

**Aliou SALL**

B.P. 3916, Dakar  
SENEGAL  
Tel: (221) 321174  
Fax: (221) 321175

**James SMITH**

CCFD, 4 rue Lantier  
75001 Paris  
FRANCE  
Tel: (331) 40265160  
Fax: (331) 40261123

**Jean VACHER**

Apostolat de la Mer  
12 rue St. Georges, Port-Louis  
MAURITIUS  
Tel: (230) 212 4237  
Fax: (230) 208 6607

**A.J. VIJAYAN**

Alakal Fortnightly  
28/747, Vanchiyoor  
Thiruvananthapuram - 35  
INDIA  
Tel: (91471) 70167/60108