

Europe/ France

A debate on Parity

This is a report of a discussion between women delegates to the meeting of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF) and Humberto Mella, the former President of Conapach (the national fishworker organization from Chile) and a member of the Coordination Committee of WFF. This discussion took place on Monday, 2 October 2000.

The meeting started with Danièle Le Sauze, the President of the French Branch of the WFF, reporting on the acceptance of, and respect for, the principle of parity between men and women in the delegations from member countries to the WFF. The dialogue that followed is as below:

Humberto Mella (CONAPACH, Chile): I have worked on the role of women in the fishery with Luisa Pineda, a woman fishworker, at the request of CONAPACH. For me, parity is not a good means for integrating women at the international level. Recognition of women will take place rather through working together, which does not place them behind men, nor in front of them, but at their side. Applying the principle of 50 per cent men, 50 per cent women in the name of parity amounts to doubting the capacity of women who lead many communities throughout the world.

If women are present here today, it is because they are leaders in their communities. Raising the issue of parity is running the risk of initiating competition between men and women, which will make the recognition of women by men more difficult. This example can be linked to that of equality between countries of the North and countries of the South. It has been very difficult to come to an agreement because we have cultural differences, so that we do not see things in the same way. We need to find a shared vision in order to arrive at a solution that relates to men, women and children.

Pauline E Tangiora (Rongomaiwahine Association, New Zealand): I would like to ask you a question: what do you mean by the South?

Humberto Mella: Poor countries.

Pauline E Tangiora: Men need to change their approach to the relationship between men and women in

the same way that they must also change their approach to rich countries and poor countries. We must not divide the world into North as rich countries and South as poor countries. I come from a country, New Zealand, which is actually in the South but assimilated into the North. I understand that men do not share the same concepts as women, but at the same time I do not accept that this means men can now oppress women. For example, it is for women to know if they want a presidency or a vice-presidency, and not for a co-ordination committee almost entirely made up of men to make proposals on behalf of women.

Mamayawa Sandouno (Association for Fisheries Development in Guinea Coankry): While we are speaking of parity, I would like to know if Humberto agrees with it or not.

Humberto Mella: For me, parity is more than replicating men and women.

Mamayawa Sandouno: That means that if there are eight decision-making posts, you would accept that six posts are taken by women and two by men?

Humberto Mella: If you can take them on, I agree. Artisanal fishing societies are matriarchal societies. Everything revolves around the women. When there are children, they turn to their mothers. And every mother of a fisherman is a woman. Parity can create the beginning of competition between men and women in the artisanal fishery.

Mamayawa Sandouno: I am not interested in talking about philosophy because we could spend all night on it. We are no longer talking about the business of the relationships between men and women. We are talking about an equal approach to men and women's roles in decision-making. We are no longer talking about integrating women into a development process designed by men.

Danièle Le Sauze: For parity to work, the principle of 50/50 has to be accepted. If it is not, for whatever reason, it will not work.

Gabriela Cruz Salazar (FENACOPEC, Ecuador): I agree with Humberto. With regard to what has been said, I think that it is for us women to decide if we need to have a presidency or a vice-presidency. We should be talking of equilibrium between men and

women at this Forum, not of percentages. The concept of countries of the North and countries of the South should not exist. We are all equal.

Humberto Mella: Tomorrow there will be a workshop discussion. Will this discussion determine the direction the Constitution takes?

Danièle Le Sauce: What will be taken into account: the opinion of the workshops or the opinion of the Co-ordination Committee?

Christina Hunt (Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters): In my group I made the proposal that there should be two co-ordinators of the Forum. The men said no. They want a co-ordinator and a vice co-ordinator. And you know as well as I do, that the vice co-ordinator will be a woman. And then there will always be one who is behind the other. I do not want that. I want a co-presidency, equality between women and men.

Marie Ademar (Family Maritime Association, Martinique): There is a movement underway. I don't want to take a man's place and I don't want a man to take my place. Parity does not mean that women take the place of men. Humberto talks of the matriarchal society in the artisanal fishery. It is precisely that society which has caused us to fail.

I will give you an image of what I am talking about. If I am a mother, it is in relation to you. If you are a father, it is in relation to me. Together the two of us are strong and there is a natural equilibrium. There is a small child for whom we are Mum and Dad. We both of us give him or her an education. You remain head of the family. You have your place in the home. I remain always the wife and I have my place in the home. In this way the child has the equilibrium of two parents. I may be wrong but it seems to me that Humberto has not understood parity. He is afraid that we will take his place, whereas we are only taking our responsibilities.

Humberto Mella: I am not in competition with any woman or any country. The president of the Artisanal Fishworkers should be a president because he/she has the capacity to be a president. I do not understand the demand for 50/50 representation.

Alba Rosa Perez (Panama): Parity means that we, the women, have the same rights to decide. We are leaders. In Panama, women are leaders of fishworker organisations because the men understand that women have the same abilities as them. Five women are presidents of these organisations and I am the president of the national federation of artisanal fishworkers. Women are capable of holding any position.

Humberto Mella: Thank you for having listened to me. To think differently does not mean imposing one's views. I will respect you as if you were my mother.