

## Asia

### A feminist perspective

***This Statement was adopted at the Asian Regional Consultation on Women in Fisheries, held in Medan, Indonesia, from 11 to 14 August 2004***

We are 53 women and men from the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal. We have met in Medan, Sumatra, Indonesia, from 11 to 14 August 2004, for the *Asian Regional Consultation on Women in Fisheries*, to analyze the impact of globalization on women in fisheries in the Asian region. This consultation takes forward the reflections and processes that were initiated at the *Asian Fisherfolk Conference: Cut Away the Net of Globalization* that took place in The Prince of Songkhla University, Hat Yai, Thailand from 25 to 29 January 2002.

We meet in Sumatra to express solidarity with the decades-old, yet still ongoing, struggles of coastal fishing communities against destructive fishing technologies, particularly trawling, that are destroying their coastal habitats and resources, their lives and their livelihoods.

This has been an occasion for women and men of fisherfolk organizations, mass-based women's organizations and non-governmental organizations to come together to reflect on, and highlight, the problems being faced by coastal fishing communities due to globalization processes.

It has been an occasion for us to reflect on the vital roles women play within the fisheries, within families and communities and within organizations—roles that need better recognition and valuation.

It has been an occasion for us to define strategies to counter the negative impacts of globalization, to define our vision of development, to draw strength from each other and to bring synergy between our struggles.

The negative impact of neoliberal processes and trends, particularly the liberalization of trade and investment; the promotion of exports; privatization of natural resources; the rollback of the State, and the privatization in the delivery of basic social services; among others, are evident to us.

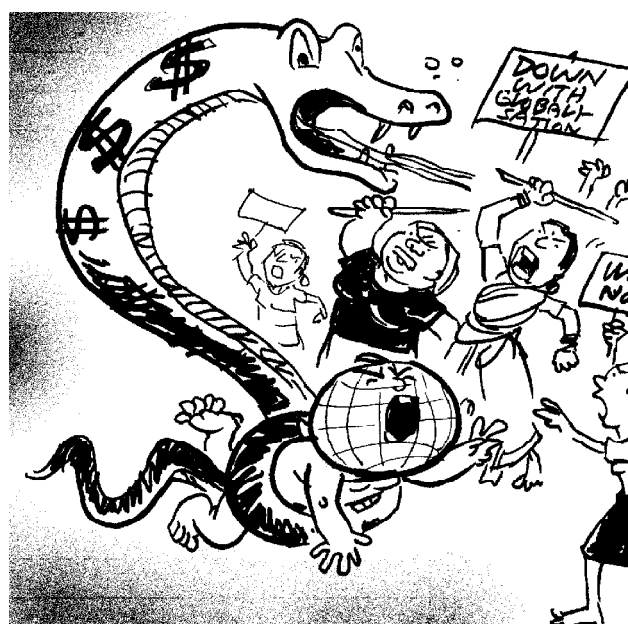
These processes have led to the proliferation of fishing technologies aimed at maximizing production with scant regard for resource sustainability, uncontrolled industrialization, urbanization, infrastructure and tourist development in coastal areas, and big 'development' projects such as mines and dams that negatively affect tail-end coastal ecosystems.

These developments have had devastating consequences for coastal fishing communities. They have led to the degradation and destruction of aquatic resources, loss of income and livelihood, break-up of communities, social problems, loss of traditional systems of knowledge and wisdom, dislocation from fishing grounds, denial of access rights, and violations of human rights.

We endorse fully the statement from the Thailand workshop that analyzed these processes and called for a halt to processes of economic globalization.

We further recognize that such neoliberal policies are experienced in very specific ways by women of fishing communities. As livelihoods from fisheries are rendered more vulnerable, women within fishing communities shoulder the additional burden of having to seek higher incomes.

In many countries, there is a transition from self-employment to wage labour, with no access to social security or decent conditions of work. We oppose the manner in which poor women are being used as banks of cheap, unprotected labour in fish processing plants and other industries.



The withdrawal of the State from provision of basic services such as health and education, and the degradation and privatization of natural resources, impose greater stress and workloads on women, who are responsible for the care and nurture of their families.

We oppose the withdrawal of the State from its role in protecting and promoting the welfare of its citizens while becoming mere agents of international capital.

With higher levels of insecurity and stress within families and within communities, women of fishing communities are experiencing greater violence, sexual and otherwise, within and outside the family.

We are particularly concerned that the oceans are being seen not as living systems and sources of food for thousands in our regions, but more as sinks for dumping wastes and for the non-living resources, such as oil, that they are expected to yield.

Equally of concern to us is the projection of aquaculture as the future of fisheries. We have witnessed the negative social and ecological aspects of export-oriented and intensive forms of aquaculture. We are aware that the benefits from aquaculture are going to a few entrepreneurs and corporate houses, while the costs are being borne by our communities. We reject this form of aquaculture development.

While there are laudable efforts to conserve marine resources, without the recognition that fishing communities play an integral part in the marine space, these efforts are, at best, ineffective. Marine conservation efforts should involve fisherfolk and not seek to alienate the livelihoods of the traditional fishing communities. We further reject measures taken in the name of “marine conservation” that are merely disguised trade barriers.

We realize that the nature of ongoing development itself is patriarchal—there is a systemic divide between the public and the private spheres in life and the systemic subjugation of women and of their sexuality, fertility and labour.

This patriarchal paradigm of development puts profit before life and is based on the exploitation of nature and disrespect of life processes. This kind of development jeopardizes the life and livelihoods of our people, while causing irreparable damage to sensitive

ecosystems and the biodiversity on which life is sustained.

We understand that these trends need to be challenged and new priorities set. We see the importance of working with a feminist perspective in creating alternatives and putting into play processes that are just, that challenge caste, class and patriarchy, and that are based on the sustainable use of resources.

We call for a people-centred, gender-just, equitable and participatory development, based on the sustainable use and management of natural resources. We call for development that values the resources—human or natural—that go towards the sustenance and nurture of life. To achieve this, we will further our organizing and mobilizing work among women within our own organizations and movements. We stand united in our struggle to fight the systems and structures of globalization.