

Asia / Thailand**Making a difference**

By Jim Enright, Southeast Asian Coordinator of the Mangrove Action Project (MAP), based in Thailand

Miya Hawa was a special leader amongst local fisherfolk leaders in Thailand. As a woman and a Muslim she automatically stood out amongst the other leaders, mostly all men, whenever they gathered. But what really made Miya an outstanding leader was when she spoke, which was directly from the heart, in bold, passionate, colourful, terminology that captivated her audience. I remember an interview of Miya's with the media, where she called fishing trawlers the 'tractors of the sea'. It was such a fitting, descriptive analogy of the destructive force they cause to the sea bottom habitat. Many academics that met her had difficulty believing Miya had only completed four years of school, and they thought somehow she had been trained by someone to give certain answers, when in fact she was speaking her own thoughts and insights to complex problems.

She always spoke honestly and truthfully, directly to the issue, and she was not afraid to offend anyone in the audience. I remember on another occasion, when she was in a meeting with other Trang fisherfolk, discussing with a World Bank-hired consultant about a proposal to build a huge tuna fishing port and processing facility on the Trang coast. After much heated discussion she simply said to the consultant: "We're not interested in jobs cleaning washrooms in your factory. We are proud, independent, fishers and we need a healthy coastal environment." The project never did go ahead, and I believe it was partly due to her and other fishers' strong convictions that this development would threaten their way of life.

Miya and her husband, Yahed, were a wonderful conservation team, for Miya was always comfortable speaking about her convictions with others, be it at their simple seaside bungalow or in any large conference hall with international representatives. Whereas, Yahed is totally at ease with guests in his

fishing boat sharing his knowledge and showing his concern for the marine world. Both always supported and complemented each other in their conservation work, influencing many people they came in touch with over the years.

What I will always remember most about Miya is her laughter, smile, and light hearted nature even in serious discussions. She never showed anger or the heavy burden put by the pressures on their way of life. She was able to make one feel that people can truly make a real difference. And Miya Hawa truly did make a difference!

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