

In solidarity: FISHERIES TREATY AT THE GLOBAL FORUM

Even as the recent Earth Summit was being widely publicised, several of the world's NGOs gathered at a contemporaneous Global Forum in Rio de Janeiro from June 1 to 14, 1992, to discuss and debate issues that they felt would otherwise have been drowned in the loud rhetoric of the conventional agenda. Among them were NGOs connected with the fisheries sector who negotiated a Fisheries Treaty. ICSF was one of the 18 signatories to the Treaty. A summary of the treaty:

Fishery resources are not only a vital source of food, they are also an invaluable input to general economic development. Yet, those for whom these resources matter most - traditional fisher-folk - are among the poorest and most disadvantaged of society.

They are often denied access to these resources and, moreover, have to compete with industrial and distant water fleets. Pollution, overfishing and non-discriminatory fishing technology combine to destroy the resource ecosystem itself. The result is a net depletion of resources.

Recognising these problems, fisherfolk organisations and other NGOs at Rio's Global Forum pledged to work towards a twin objective:

- Support fishers and fishing communities, and
- Conserve and protect aquatic ecosystems.

Principles of the Fisheries Treaty

The basic rights of fisherfolk, which extend beyond mere human rights, are provided in laws, agreements and conventions which also deal with minimum standards of safe working conditions. Three important manifestations of such basic rights for fisherfolk are:

- formation of their own organizations which should be allowed to participate in the planning, management and development process in fisheries;
- reservation of marine and inland water zones exclusively for artisanal fishing; and

- access to credit and social services.

Apart from these basic rights, the Treaty addresses these concerns:

Artisanal Fisheries

This sector should get priority because it is important in several ways: as a source of food, income and employment; a means of ensuring community stability; a way of promoting resource conservation and environmental protection of marine, coastal and inland water areas.

Ecologically Sound Practices

Fisheries should be conducted in an ecologically sound manner to sustain the resource for the present and future generations. It should also be socially just, showing respect for cultural, biological and ecosystem diversity.

Equity

Access to fishery resources should not be based solely on political power and the availability of technology and capital. It should recognise the needs of fisheries communities and be based on equitable principles and respect for the environment.

Ecosystem Approach

Managing fisheries from an ecosystem perspective calls for integrated management principles which take into account human activities which degrade aquatic ecosystems and the environment. These include:

- inappropriate and destructive practices of agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fishing.
- land-based and sea-based sources of pollution.
- urban, industrial and tourism development.

Participation

Only the full and meaningful participation of all interests, including fishers (especially those with traditional knowledge and experience), NGOs and scientists will ensure the successful management of fisheries and aquatic environments.

Women in Fisheries

The vital role of women in fisheries and integrated community development should be recognised and supported and in decisions affecting these matters they should participate at all levels.

Precautionary Approach and Environmental Impact Assessments

All decisions which affect fisheries and aquatic environments, including environmental impact assessments, should be taken with caution.

High Seas Fishing

Coastal states and fishing communities have special rights and needs with respect to straddling stocks and highly migratory species under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Recognising this, high seas fishing must be subject to a legally binding regime which takes into account the ecosystem effects on the high seas as well as the adjacent coastal waters. Environmental standards for high seas fishing should apply to fisheries for straddling stocks and highly migratory species in the EEZs.

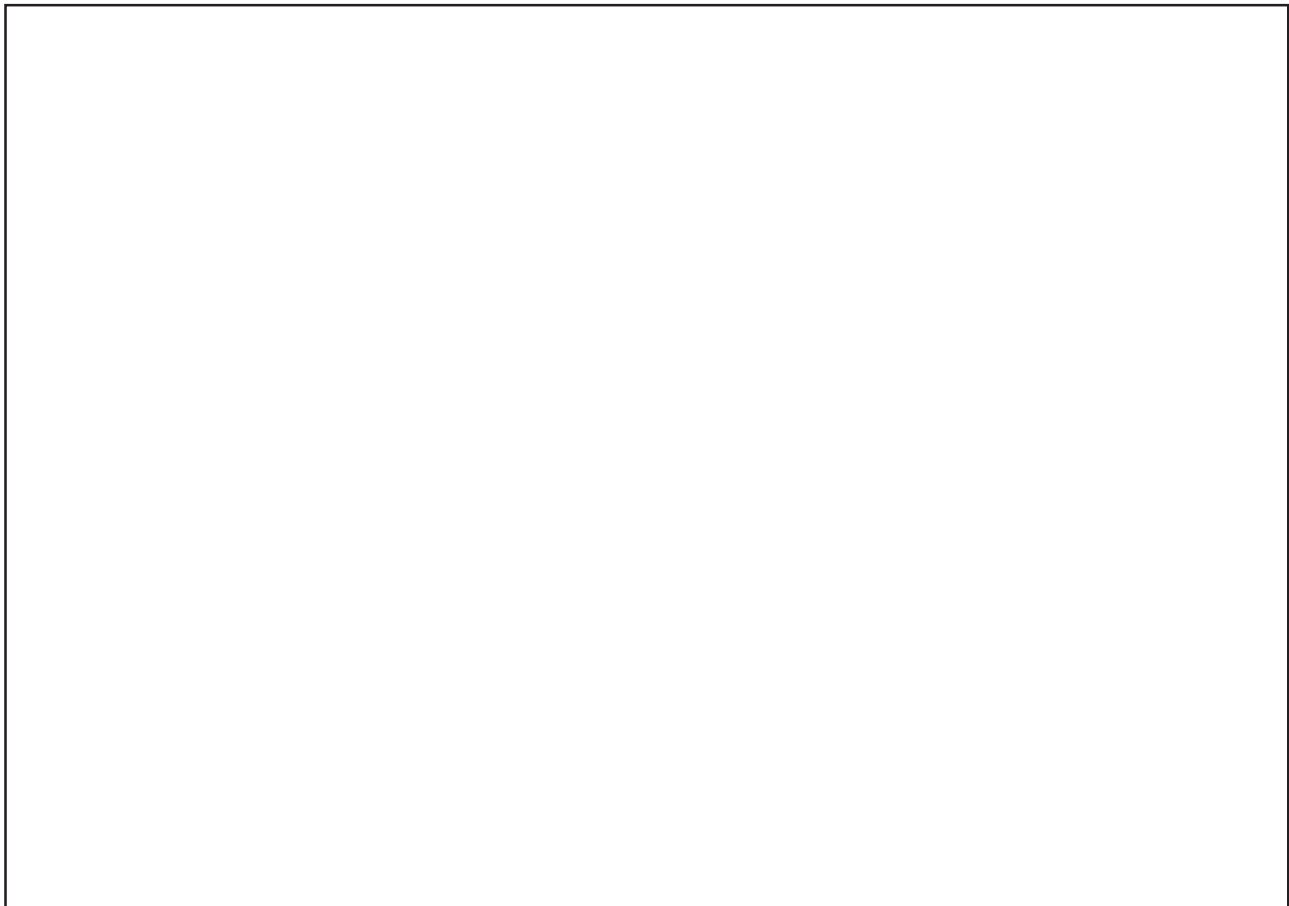
- implement and encourage development of technologies which reduce by-catch and protect aquatic ecosystems.
- restrict or eliminate technologies which are non-selective or otherwise harmful to the aquatic environment.
- incorporate enforcement mechanisms and effective monitoring programs into fisheries management.
- negotiate an internationally binding regime for high seas fisheries, including mechanisms to ensure compliance with the UN driftnet moratorium.

The Treaty also encourages research to increase understanding of the relationships between aquatic organisms and their environment, which determine ecologically appropriate fishery yields. Such programs should be broad-based and recognise traditional and indigenous knowledge.

Action plan

To improve the quality of life of fisherfolk and fishworkers, there is a need for common action based on these principles and using a comprehensive ecosystem approach. The following are specific recommendations:

The Treaty also calls for networking among fishers and NGOs through information exchange, visits and training, and also joint political action. The latest in order to organize a World Conference on Fisheries and Environment at Rome, 1994, ten years after the I International Conference of Fishworkers and Support-





Box signatories

ers held in Rome, 1984, simultaneously with the FAO Conference.

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AME - Associacao Matogrossense do Ecologia
Carolina Joana da Saliva (Brazil)

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CISP - Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli
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ICSF - International Collective in Support of Fishworkers
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