

ICSF Cebu conference

What, yet another conference?

The forthcoming Cebu conference of ICSF should think of new consumer-supported campaigns to ensure eco-friendly shrimp culture

I think most of us in ICSF are wary of large conferences as they tend to mean large expenditure, with very little actually achieved in the end. But somehow, we seem to feel justified about the last two conferences, in Rome and Bangkok.

The first provided a stimulus for the mobilisation of fishworkers the world over, while the second brought together leaders of the new movements who pledged to remain the 'beacons of the sea'.

We are now on the eve of a third conference and I feel that unless we share some of our concerns about what we expect from another conference, we may not arrive at something dynamic and meaningful. While all of us will respond separately to the conference's Status Paper already circulated, there are other issues which need to be addressed.

One of the main problems related to resource depletion all over the world is the use of overefficient and ecologically destructive technology. In most Asian countries, fishworkers have been fighting trawl fishing which focuses on catching prawns in the inshore waters.

More recently, they are also protesting the destruction of mangroves in the mad rush for intensive brackish water aquaculture. The impact of both of these activities is far-reaching.

The impetus for this type of overfishing and intensive culture is the export market for shrimps and prawns which are foreign exchange earners for the exporting countries. Due to this fact, no government in the Asian region is willing to take any serious measure to heed the demands of the small fishworkers'

struggle to control trawling or even ban it in the inshore waters. There is much less awareness about the problems resulting from the destruction of mangroves by intensive aquaculture. I fear that the Cebu conference will resolutely pinpoint these dangers once again and may come up with some nice, pretty statements on coastal resource management.

While I do believe in the need for such management, I feel this only once again places all the pressure on the coastal communities. They are the ones who have to bear the burden of policing their resources, while there is no involvement from the communities who relish the so-called 'delicious seafood' produced at the cost of the very livelihoods of the coastal people.

I therefore advocate that ICSF, as an international support group, links this question to a larger consumer campaign and finds ways of intervening in the importing countries with actions designed to encourage the import of only eco-friendly shrimps and prawns.

Eco-friendly shrimps

We, of course, need to clarify what 'ecofriendly' means. Such shrimps and prawns should be those

- caught in passive gears
- cultured semi-intensively without destroying mangroves or the water system
- cultured from fingerlings produced in hatcheries and not from natural waters.
- processed by exporters who respect labour rights, particularly those of women workers, who

The Cebu Conference

Nearly 10 years have elapsed since the international Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters (ICFWS) was convened in Rome in 1984.

Most of the issues raised at that meeting about the rights of fishworker's to participate in the management of the fisheries which sustain them have since gained international recognition.

However, the last decade has seen escalating conflicts at sea and on land between different interest groups, while the international fishing fleet continues to grow beyond the regenerative capacity of the seas.

The rights of fishworkers to resources and their traditional livelihoods are yet to be fully recognised. These are disturbing trends, and need urgent attention.

The international Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) believes that it is now time to convene a follow-up conference to the 1984 ICFWS.

This is now scheduled for June 2-7, 1994 and will be held in Cebu, the Philippines. Selected participants from over 40 countries are expected to attend. The conference will mark a decade of fishworkers' struggles since the ICFWS initiative in Rome.

The specific objectives of the conference are:

- to enable fishworkers and their supporters to consider the current status of the world's fisheries and the coastal environment.

- to facilitate better awareness of transnational linkages in fisheries such as multilateral and bilateral fishery agreements, and North-South trade regimes.
- to understand the ramifications of nascent participatory resource management in fisheries and the coastal zone, and to discuss the role of fishworkers' organisations in the developing programmes and strategies for true equitable management of coastal resources.
- to strengthen fishworkers' initiatives towards organising their struggles in the face of increasing pressure on the environment and the fishery stock, and to assist fishworkers to establish an agreed framework of strategies to counter the forces that are ranged against them.
- to establish a three-year programme of work for ICSF in support of the conference decisions

The conference should help strengthen the fishworker's movements. Not only will it provide a perspective on the issues of equity and sustainability in fisheries, but it will also help fishworkers' organizations chalk out strategies to counter inequitable fishing methods as well as international fisheries agreements.

For ICSF, the Cebu conference will be of particular significance. It will be an important aid in designing ICSF's triennial programme, keeping in mind the needs and priorities of fishworkers' organizations.

comprise the majority in processing plants

I feel confident that such strategies can be worked out, particularly when I see the success that other campaigns have had like the dolphin-friendly tuna campaign or the embargo on the import of Indian carpets produced by exploiting child labour. I feel a campaign of this nature may initiate other campaigns in areas where the growing market economy penetrates and destroys the livelihoods of marginal people the world over.

I also feel this is another way in which we can concretely express our support to the small-scale fishworkers.

This piece is written by Nalini Nayak, Project Leader, Women in Fisheries Programme of ICSF