

The NGO statement

Several NGOs feel that they should not be denied access to the decision-making in the FAO process

A number of NGOs present would like to make a statement in addition to the report of the NGO/FAO Consultation. We would like to re-emphasize our strong disagreement with the view put forward by a few organizations that NGO access should be restricted. These organizations appear to be associated with, or represent, the interests of large vessel owners and other companies involved in the industrial sector of the fishing industry.

We would like to remind Ministers that the 1984 FAO Strategy Document stated "It is important to involve all groups concerned, including administrators, scientists, and fishermen in the process of formulating and implementing management measures."

Whether at the local, national or international level, we believe that NGOs dealing with fishworkers, environment, development, women, trade union and others need to be fully involved in the decision-making with respect to fisheries conservation and management, development, law, investment and aid.

We would also like to draw the attention of Ministers to our concerns regarding the state of the world's fisheries today. Most major fisheries are fully exploited, overexploited or depleted.

Approximately 17 to 39 million tonnes of fish are caught and discarded annually. The industrial fishing fleets of the world are grossly overcapitalized, heavily subsidized and fishing well beyond the limits of sustainability.

As nations and fleets continue to compete for declining stocks of fish, conflicts will only continue to rise. The recent seizure of a Spanish vessel by Canadian

authorities is only the latest in an ongoing series of clashes at sea.

Artisanal fishworkers, both men and women, are increasingly struggling to maintain or regain their traditional access to coastal resources, protect the environment and to sustainably manage their fisheries. In spite of the fact that artisanal fisheries supply at least half the world's supplies of fish for human consumption, they receive little support or protection.

Marine and coastal areas are being increasingly degraded by land-based sources of marine pollution and environmentally inappropriate coastal development. In particular, the environmental damage and socio-economic disruptions associated with intensive coastal aquaculture for high-value species such as prawns are issues of great concern to our organizations.

We believe that certain fundamental principles must apply to the conservation, management, development and trade in fisheries:

- Governments must recognize the rights and interests of artisanal, including subsistence, fishworkers and their communities as means of ensuring community stability, conservation and the protection of marine, coastal and inland waters
- Fishing must be conducted in a manner that is ecologically sound and socially just, respecting biological, ecosystem and cultural diversity and must be sustainable for both present and future generations

- Access to fisheries must recognize the needs of communities and be based on equitable principles and respect for the environment
- Fisheries must be managed from an ecosystem perspective and be based on a precautionary approach, including the use of more selective fishing techniques and practices
- The role of women in fisheries must be acknowledged, strengthened and reflected at all levels of decision-making
- The protection of the marine and coastal environments from the deleterious effects of any human activity must be made integral to fisheries conservation
- Finally, NGOs must be afforded the opportunity to participate at all levels of decision-making at the national, regional and international levels. At the international level, transparency and public participation should apply not only to NGO participation in the work of the FAO but to all relevant organizations, including international aid agencies and the multilateral development banks

The problems in fisheries throughout the world are serious and require urgent action. We believe that governments are aware of the problems of overfishing, excess fishing capacity, subsidies, by-catch, waste and discards, over-capitalization, the violation of the rights of fishworkers, the migration of northern fleets to southern countries' waters, the negative impacts of fisheries trade on nutrition, and the degradation of the marine and coastal environments.

What is needed now is the political will to translate concern into action and, through effective policies and public participation, implement fundamental fisheries reforms.

We strongly encourage Ministers to give due consideration to the concerns and the positions of the NGOs expressed in this

statement. With the entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, states have a unique opportunity to further elaborate the obligations with respect to fisheries. The drafting of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks provide important opportunities to do so.

Though we believe that some progress has been made on both sets of negotiations, the basic concerns of our organizations and the principles outlined above have been far from fully taken into account. We urge the Ministers to take up these issues in these negotiations and in other relevant negotiations or treaty organizations such as the Biodiversity Convention, the UNEP Conference on land-based sources of marine pollution and other forums.

We conclude by stating that we believe NGOs have the right to participate at all levels of fisheries decision-making and we look forward to further consultation with the FAO and other relevant organizations and agencies at the national and international levels.

This statement was made at Rome on 15 March 1995 on behalf of the following organizations: Bigkis-Lakas (Phillippines), Comite Catholique Contre La Faim et Pour Le Development, Collectif National Des Pecheurs Artisansaux Du Senegal, Confederacion Nacional de Pescadores Artesanales de Chile, Greenpeace International, Intermediate Technology Development Group (UK), International Collective in Support of Fishworkers, International Council of Women, Women and Fisheries Network (Fiji) and World Wide Fund for Nature.