

A long way to go

To raise consciousness on women's problems is not an easy task, as a recent meeting in Spain found out

Women's associations from France, Portugal, Andalusia, the Basque country and Galicia met in Vigo, Spain on 25 and 30 April at an international meeting on the theme 'Support and Responsibility'.

The women resolved to implement an awareness-raising project for the wives of fishermen. They unanimously agreed on the need for more information on their rights and the necessity to raise awareness in society at large about their problems. But they realized that they needed considerable time to get the different participating countries to compile information for this project.

The discussions between fishermen and their wives on their aspirations as maritime professionals elicited different responses in different countries.

In France, the priority was to get better prices for their fish, while in other countries the women demanded superior working conditions, higher wages and safety at sea.

At the meeting, the women condemned the lack of collective action and, most of all, the fear of losing one's job because of protesting against the boatowners. They also expressed concern at the disenchantment and disillusionment spreading among the young people working at sea.

To help meet their aspirations, they relied mainly on women's associations in Galicia and Andalusia, and the Apostolate of the Sea in France. They have also set up unions in the Basque country.

Astonishingly, although a request for consultation was broadcast over the external service of Radio Spain, not a

single response was received from seagoing fishermen. The association Rosa dos Ventos draws attention to this negative attitude, which results not only from the fishermen's fears but also from the obstructive behaviour of their bosses and the captains, who are only concerned with being in the good books of the boatowners.

The wives of fishermen from the Basque country are working with their husbands to help overcome their disenchantment and disillusionment. They are also striving to establish labour laws and collective bargaining rights.

During the recent 'fish war' between Spain/EU and Canada, the women agreed to encourage reflection among fishermen on fishing grounds and the need to respect them. The international meeting at Vigo also expressed its support to the Spanish fishing fleet by participating in the demonstration held in Santiago de Compostela to protest the agreement with Canada.

This piece is by Ana Roman Rodriguez of Rosa dos Ventos, Spain