



## Milestones

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### COFI takes landmark decision on small-scale fisheries

The Twenty-Ninth session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) that met in Rome from 31 January to 4 February 2011 approved the development of a new international instrument on small-scale fisheries to complement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), drawing on relevant existing instruments. The Committee agreed that, in view of the important role played by small-scale fisheries, FAO should continue to give priority to small-scale fisheries and ensure adequate visibility for them, particularly in relevant international fora, which deal directly or indirectly with these fisheries.

The proposal to develop a new instrument was supported by over 20 countries that included Brazil, Norway, Thailand, South Africa, Morocco, Namibia, Russia, Chile, Mauritania, Indonesia, Oman, Mozambique, Afghanistan, Mexico, United States of America, Angola, Algeria, Mauritius, Cameroon and Ivory Coast. Norway and Brazil specifically suggested that the proposed instrument take into consideration the rights and interests of women. The Committee agreed that the new

instrument could take the form of international guidelines, be voluntary in nature, address both inland and marine fisheries and focus on the needs of developing countries. The Committee recommended that all stakeholders be associated, as appropriate, with its development.

The coming period should see the development of these guidelines. Small-scale fishworker and support groups, who have been advocating for such an international instrument for several years, are hopeful that the instrument will address and secure the human rights—social, economic, cultural, civil and political—of small-scale and artisanal fishworkers and fishing communities in both countries of the North and South.

The extent that the instrument reflects their aspirations remains to be seen, as some States are of the view that human rights-related issues are outside the mandate of COFI. Also to be seen is the extent to which the proposed guidelines recognize, protect and promote the rights of women within fisheries. In a year in which the world celebrates the centennial of International Women's Day, this is particularly critical. ❏