

SAMUDRA editorial

Fait accompli?

Another response to the editorial in SAMUDRA Report No. 24 seeks to spark off a larger debate on what position to take *vis-à-vis* the WTO

I am very grateful to Anna Rosa for raising an alarm and highlighting an ambiguity that plagues several people regarding their positions in relation to the World Trade Organization (WTO).

As an individual, I do not support a pro-WTO position. In fact, this subject was seriously discussed at the last ICSF Animation Team meeting in 1998. Then, Diegus from Brazil and I took a firm position that ICSF should be on the side of the protestors. Diegus also categorically stated that our secretariat should be spending more time with the protestors' lobby than with the ongoing deliberations of the WTO and other UN bodies. This got reported in the minutes of the meeting, which all the members should have read and responded to. But again, unfortunately, members seem to prefer to keep silent on such issues.

As supporters of the inshore fishery, we are called upon to assess the ongoing political and economic processes that marginalize the toiling fishworkers. This is not merely an academic question. As supporters of the fishworker movements, our affinity with the actual reality of people should help us take political positions in their favour. Unfortunately, it seems that the majority of us in the ICSF probably look at the creation of the WTO as a *fait accompli* and adopt a TINA (there is no alternative) position. This either means we are distancing ourselves from the reality of the masses or, as an international organization, which now has quite an international profile, we are not free to pursue our pro-people stand. Both of these positions are serious and call for immediate introspection.

Regarding the role of the WTO, there could be a serious lack of information. In fact, at our last Animation Team meeting, a

couple of the members felt it wasn't possible to grapple with these macro-issues when we are so totally absorbed with the immediate micro-issues. If this is so, there is need for us, as a network, to appraise ourselves of these international dynamics that affect our daily lives, and, in the present context of fast-changing global equations, we should restate our positions and role as an international support network of the inshore fishery.

It is also a fact that we are not infallible. We have to learn from our mistakes. If this SAMUDRA Report editorial kicks off a serious debate among us, then it has served a purpose. The test will be to see how many of us are keen on such a debate so that we can inform ourselves better and are able to arrive at a decision by consensus. 3

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