

**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS (ICSF)  
INTERNATIONAL OCEAN INSTITUTE (IOI) INDIA**

**Forging Unity: Coastal Communities  
and the Indian Ocean's Future**

**IIT Madras, Chennai  
9-13 October 2001**

**VISION STATEMENT**

1. We, the participants from 13 countries of the Indian Ocean region—Mozambique, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, Maldives and Seychelles—along with delegates from France, Belgium, UK and Norway, met at Chennai (Madras), India from 9 to 13 October 2001. Coming from fishworker unions, research institutions and universities, NGOs, and Governments, our purpose was to discuss issues and consider measures to forge unity among coastal communities for the sustainable and equitable utilization of fisheries resources in the Indian Ocean region.

2. The Indian Ocean region has great marine biological diversity and the largest number of commercial fish species in the world. Fish is an important source of food as well as employment, income and foreign exchange in the region. This region also has the largest number of fishworkers in the world. The majority are in the small-scale sector, using a diversity of craft-gear combinations. A significant proportion of the population lives in poverty, and from environmental and socioeconomic points of view, coastal fishing communities are among the most vulnerable.

3. Rapid economic growth, without adequate considerations for equity, and fuelled by the pressures of liberalization and globalization, has increased the unregulated expansion of economic activities in coastal areas. These include rapid urban development, an increase in the number of polluting industrial units, the growth of luxury tourism and the expansion of industrial shrimp aquaculture, among others. This has hastened the degradation of coastal habitats and often led to the displacement of coastal fishing communities from their traditional living and occupational spaces. To regulate these trends, it is imperative to:

- ensure effective legislation and institutional arrangements that adopt an integrated approach on access to, and use of, resources, bringing in both the landward and seaward components of the coastal zone and its dynamic interface;
- institute participatory mechanisms for decision-making on coastal resource use, according to the principle of subsidiarity, in order to ensure the representation of traditional coastal communities, especially those involved in artisanal/small-scale fisheries;

- guarantee priority rights of coastal fishing communities to the coastal area where they live and the aquatic resources to which they have customarily enjoyed access for livelihood; and
- assure priority to decent living conditions for coastal fishing communities and safeguard their own development interests.

4. The Indian Ocean region is characterized by fragile and highly productive ecosystems, with complex species and environmental inter-relationships. However, in almost all countries of the Indian Ocean region, fishery resources in the near-shore waters are poorly managed and overexploited. While these resources are the mainstay of the livelihood of fishing families, they are often subject to encroachment by domestic and foreign large-scale fishing vessels, often using non-selective, destructive gear such as bottom trawls. These unsustainable practices also lead to the damage of small-scale fishing gear and, at times, loss of life through collisions. While untapped resources in offshore areas are known to exist, management arrangements for them are poor or non-existent. The Indian Ocean has important oil and mineral resources, which are being exploited. It is also an ocean with extensive maritime transport, and is a sink for urban, industrial and toxic wastes. To defend the livelihood of the small-scale fishing communities and maintain the productivity and integrity of this ocean and its resources, it is imperative that:

- a socially just ecosystem approach to resource use and fisheries resource management is adopted by States in the region;
- States should phase out destructive gear, such as bottom trawling, and assess and reduce overcapacity, in accordance with the FAO's International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity. For social, economic and ecological reasons, the capacity of the industrial fleet that engages in the same fisheries as the small-scale sector should be minimized as a matter of priority;
- States should encourage small-scale, selective, sustainable harvesting technologies with strong backward and forward linkages that enhance and maintain employment opportunities within fishing communities; and
- States should prevent marine pollution from activities such as maritime transport and infrastructure development, extraction of non-living resources, dumping of toxic and other wastes in the region, and introduction of exotic species, in accordance with relevant international conventions and other instruments, including the Global Plan of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA/LBA).

5 The role of women in the economic activities of coastal fishing communities differs by region and culture, but is universally vital in sustaining livelihoods. The degradation of coastal ecosystems and the displacement of fishing communities from their living spaces have adversely affected the workload and quality of life of women of these communities. Given the almost complete absence of data and recognition of women's work in fishing communities, little is known about these aspects. It is imperative to:

- recognize and value the work of women, and to develop a database on their work in coastal fishing communities;
- safeguard the existing spaces of women in fisheries;
- ensure women's participation in resource management and other decision-making processes; and
- improve conditions of work of women in fish processing plants in both the organized and unorganized/informal sector.

6. Unauthorized trans-boundary movement of small-scale fishing vessels and the subsequent detention and punishment of fishworkers by States has become a major issue for many coastal communities as well as for administrators who grapple with the problem. This is largely the consequence of the declaration of exclusive economic zones (EEZs), which sometimes prevents coastal fishworkers from accessing their traditional fishing grounds. However, it is also a result of other compulsions, such as the enhanced fishing capacities of the artisanal small-scale fishing fleets as well as the depletion of local, coastal fisheries resources. This complex problem needs context-specific solutions that protect the human rights of fishworkers. It is important that:

- implementation of legislation to deal with the arrest and detention of fishworkers in the waters of other coastal States should be in accordance with Article 73 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982 Convention), the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1976 and the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1976, among others. Penalties for illegal fishing should be based on the principles of necessity and proportionality;
- States should evolve necessary mechanisms for the release and repatriation of arrested fishermen on a priority basis;
- recognizing that rigid enforcement of maritime boundaries in historic waters in relation to communities that live and fish close to such boundaries can lead to tragic consequences, the interests of such communities need to be accommodated, along with security and other national concerns;
- fishworkers using small-scale vessels apprehended in territorial waters for illegal fishing should not be prosecuted under laws that apply to illegal immigrants. In such cases, the fact that the illegal fishing occurs within territorial waters rather than the EEZ should not lead to punishments that are more severe than those for similar violations in the EEZ; and
- fishworkers should not be made victims of maritime boundary disputes between States. States need to have working arrangements that provide fishworkers access to resources in such fishing grounds for life and livelihood.

7. The development of relatively small boats with long endurance capabilities and using selective fishing methods has demonstrated that large industrial fleets, often from non-riparian States, can be superfluous for the exploitation of all highly migratory resources. In order to encourage this evolving small-scale sector of riparian developing States:

- coastal States with surplus resources should consider providing preferential access to such artisanal/small-scale seaworthy fishing vessels, subject to effective flag State control and responsibility;
- States should, where such opportunities exist, facilitate the conclusion of an agreement that allows its small-scale long-distance fleet to legally engage in such fisheries in a responsible manner;
- States should not export excess capacity and destructive fishing methods;
- coastal States should, given that at least a part of the reason for trans-boundary movement is the poor management of EEZs in many countries, improve the management of their fisheries resources, exercise effective control over their fleet, and move towards responsible fisheries; and
- States should be enabled to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, in accordance with the International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IPOA-IUU). This is of special concern to developing States, especially small island developing States, that depend heavily on their fisheries resources for food security, economic well-being and development.

8. The principal beneficiaries of the current fishing pattern for valuable highly migratory fish stocks in the Indian Ocean region are not those coastal States whose territories are principally in this region. The rapid growth of tuna catches by distant-water fishing nations in the very recent past should not be interpreted to have established a habitual right in the sense of the 1982 Convention. Decisions on access to these resources should, instead, be governed by:

- a true tradition of harvesting these resources;
- dependency of a country's economy on these resources; and
- the potential of economic and social development for small island developing States and other developing countries in the region.

9. There is evidence that coastal States in the region have accepted fishing agreements with distant-water fishing nations that have not been to the best long-term interests of their economies or to the advantage of their coastal fishing communities. This has often been caused by unfair pressure being exerted through linking the conditions of the fisheries access agreements to the provision of aid and trade, in contravention of international instruments. To create fair fishing arrangements:

- States should apply Articles 11.2.7 and 11.2.8 of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, which discourage States from making access to markets a condition for access to resources;
- States should develop national fisheries policies in which the coastal fishing communities' rights and needs are taken into account before entering into any negotiation for granting access to distant-water fishing nations;

- States should ensure full transparency and accountability in their dealings with distant-water fishing companies and joint ventures and agreements in order to combat corruption; and
- conditions of work and service on board distant-water fishing vessels should conform to generally accepted international regulations, procedures and practices, in particular those adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

10. Coastal communities in the Indian Ocean region stand to gain from greater interaction and sharing of information and experiences, capabilities, skills and development alternatives. Many of the countries in the western Indian Ocean region can also draw lessons from the negative experiences of the Asian countries in pursuing development strategies in the realm of fisheries and industrialization. These have had an adverse impact on coastal fisheries resources and coastal ecosystems at an earlier point in time. An example would be the negative impact that industrial shrimp aquaculture has had on the coastal habitats and livelihoods of coastal communities.

11. Keeping the above in mind, as well as the many positive examples of community-based and sustainable development alternatives, it is imperative to strengthen appropriate South-South co-operation. This is particularly relevant in the realm of human resource capability building, use of appropriate and environmentally selective technologies, exchange of experiences in community development projects and resource conservation and rejuvenation measures.

12. In adopting this Vision Statement in the *United Nations Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations* and amidst the current challenges to world peace, we are especially conscious of our responsibility and duty to continue to promote co-operation among nations and forge unity of the coastal communities in the Indian Ocean's future.

Chennai, India

13 October 2001