

**Opening Speech of H.E. Nao Thuok,**  
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Mr. Rolf Willmann, Senior Fishery Policy Officer, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, FAO Rome, Dr. John Kurien, Co-ordinator, ICSF, Ms. Chandrika Sharma, Executive Secretary, ICSF, Mr. Pisit Charmsnoh, President, Yadfon Association, Thailand, honourable representatives from the governments from the Asian region, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning!

On behalf of the Fisheries Administration and on my own behalf, first of all, I wish to extend my warmest welcome to everyone attending the symposium on “Asserting Rights, Defining Responsibilities: Perspectives from Small-Scale Fishing Communities on Coastal and Fisheries Management in Asia”. It is our great honour and pleasure to host this important symposium with the collaboration and participation of Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, representing the Governments, International and National Organizations.

Last week we completed a workshop on the same topic. The workshop was attended by representatives of fishing communities, other national community organizations and NGOs from over 10 Asian countries. They discussed the topic from the perspective of the communities and also came to some conclusions which are prepared in the form of a statement of their concerns.

This symposium is discussing the same topic—but more from the perspective of the governments of the region. We fully endorse this approach where government and community share their perspectives on the same topic. This is the way to build consensus between State and society if we are to create rights and define responsibility in a sustainable manner.

Ladies and gentlemen, fisheries, as you know, is of vital importance in Cambodia. In terms of total freshwater capture fish production, Cambodia is next only to China, Bangladesh and India. However, in terms of per capita production, Cambodia is the highest. More than 5 million people are employed— full or part time—in fisheries. The sector is crucial not only to people’s livelihoods; it also contributes over 11 per cent of the national GDP.

Fish is a vital and generally affordable source of food for our population, second only to rice. It accounts for more than 75 per cent of the animal protein intake. An average of 75.6 kg of fish per person/annum is consumed in fish dependent communities particularly around the Great Lake and Tonle Sap, as compared to a national average of 151 kg of rice per year. These consumption figures indicate that the inland fisheries of Cambodia contribute more to the national food balance than any other inland fishery in the world.

Bearing in mind that the fisheries sector is crucial to people’s livelihoods and the national economy, the Royal Government, during its second mandate, achieved significant reforms in many areas, especially in the fisheries sector. In the third mandate, the Royal Government continues to promote fisheries reforms by designating fisheries as one side of the Rectangular Strategy. The RGC considers, national and international organization as well as the private sector to be development partners. For many years, Fisheries Administration has received fruitful support and collaboration from donors, national and international NGOs and other development partners in implementing its fisheries policy reform effectively and successfully.

Let me brief the distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, about

fisheries reform in Cambodia. In October 2000, the Prime Minister of the RGC initiated historical change in the fisheries sector by releasing more than 56 per cent (536,302 hectares) of fishing lot concession areas for local people to organize community fisheries. The purpose of this reform is to promote broad local participation in fisheries management and the efficient, sustainable, and equitable use of living aquatic resources. This reform was received enthusiastically by many people, especially those living inside or near fishing lots. Therefore, in Cambodia, rights and co-management for small-scale fisheries is being demonstrated in action and not only in words.

The new fisheries law, which just has been enacted in 2006 by the King, has the objective of ensuring management of inland and marine fisheries and conservation of biodiversity, and of promoting the livelihood of local communities. It is notable that the traditional use rights of fishing communities are recognized under this legislation.

Towards ensuring sustainable fisheries, the RGC, through a Sub-Decree on Community Fisheries, encourages the establishment of community fisheries in inland and coastal areas. Attempts are being made to ensure greater participation of local communities in fisheries conservation and management. There are also initiatives to improve coordination between different sectors to minimize negative impacts on fisheries.

The RGC is committed to responsible fisheries and to the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and the 1995 Mekong Agreement on the Co-operation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin.

An event such as this, at the Asian level, is unique, in that it brings together representative of fishing communities, fishworker organizations, NGOs, governments, and multilateral agencies, for meaningful sharing of

experiences on ways in which rights of fishing communities to a just and secure livelihood can be protected, towards responsible management of fisheries resources.

Ladies and gentlemen, if we are to undertake successful fisheries management initiatives, both inland and marine, it is hardly sufficient to have only national legislations and initiatives. We need to co-operate at the regional and international levels as well. Therefore, it is great pleasure to cooperate with ICSF to organize this Asian-level Workshop and Symposium.

This symposium is very important for all of us in the region to share knowledge, experiences, and lessons learnt and I hope that this symposium will promote active discussions and have a positive outcome that will benefit all of us for the sake of small-scale community fisheries co-management. Cambodia's experience with fisheries co-management is largely initiated by the state. We are slowly but creatively involving the communities to take control over the resources which have been assigned to them for their stewardship. We in Cambodia—both the government and the communities—wish to share our experiences and also to learn from the experiences of others at this symposium.

Once again, I would like to express my deep appreciation for the presence of distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen to this workshop and symposium. The presence of distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen shows a strong commitment and regional cooperation in small-scale fisheries co-management.

Before closing, I would like to wish distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen great success, prosperity, happiness and a good stay in the Kingdom of Cambodia, the land of Angkor Wat.

Without further delay, let me declare this Symposium on "Asserting Rights, Defining Responsibilities: Perspectives from Small-Scale Fishing Communities on Coastal and Fisheries Management in Asia" open. Thank you very much for your attention and have a successful symposium. 3