

Introduction to the Workshop

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Arun Sues Die, Good Morning, Vanakam, Namaste, Salam Datang, Mabuhay, Yin dee, Ayubowan, Khush amaadiid, Swagatam,

His Excellency Nao Thuok, Respected Mr. Nomura, my friend Elmer Ferrer, my student and colleague Chandrika Sharma, respected participants from all the countries outside Cambodia and my dear friends and former colleagues from Cambodia,

It is a great honour for me to stand before you today to introduce the workshop. I also count it a privilege to come back once again to Cambodia, where I have learnt so much from those in government, from civil society and from the communities.

Before I begin to introduce the workshop I need to give you some information about ICSF so that you can understand the context and the rationale of this event.

ICSF traces its history to the historic conference that we organized in Rome in 1984 as a counter-conference to the FAO World Conference on Fisheries where all the representative of nation states participated. On that occasion, we argued vehemently for the rights of small-scale fishing communities to be an integral part of the FAO event. However, since this was not possible, we had no choice but to have our own event. Consequently 100 representatives of fishworkers and their supporters from 34 countries gathered in Rome in an event which we called the International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters.

The key follow-up conclusions of the Rome Conference were three:

- Fishworkers and fishing communities the world over faced similar problems and, therefore, they have a mutual responsibility to find effective solutions.
- Fishworkers would have to organize themselves better at the national level and also meet together more

often at the regional and global level

- There was an important role for a network of supporters to further the cause of fishworkers.

The creation of the ICSF in 1986 was the result of the third conclusion.

The ICSF is a network of individuals, currently from 20 countries spread across the world. We are an international network but with a Third World focus. Our members come from different disciplinary backgrounds, but the common factor is that we are all working closely with small-scale and artisanal fishing communities in different parts of the world. It is our endeavour to support these fishing communities and their organizations and empower them to participate in fisheries from the multiple perspectives of justice, participation, sustainability and self-reliance. Among our members we have individuals who have nearly 35-40 years of experience working closely with fishing communities. Collectively, we can claim to have well over 800 person years of such experience.

Over the last 20 years of our existence, we have worked in all the continents of the world. We have done studies, undertaken training programmes, lobbied for important causes affecting fishworkers, published many documents, conducted several exchange programmes and organized events such as this where we have brought together fishing communities, scientists, community activists, researchers and representatives of State to discuss issues of common concern.

One of the weaknesses of our work has been that we have not been able to address the concerns of inland fisheries and inland fishing communities. We do not have members in the big inland fishing countries like Cambodia and Bangladesh, for example.

This event is really our first attempt to correct this bias. It is also the first time

we are collaborating with a government. We are, therefore, certainly looking forward to increasing our network and our realm of concern into inland fisheries.

And now to the introduction of the workshop.

What better place to hold such a meeting than Cambodia to discuss rights and responsibilities in fisheries from the perspective of communities and the State?

Cambodia is the only country in Asia where the State has taken giant leaps to create rights for fishing communities and help them to attempt to mutually define responsibilities for co-management. This initiative has come from the highest level – the Prime Minister himself. Large tracts of inland water areas have been taken out of the control of influential and rich individuals and given over to the communities to manage. This reform policy has been ably implemented by the Fisheries Administration headed by H.E. Nao Thuok.

However, the situation of the fishing communities in Cambodia is special. They have gone through a long period of civil strife, mass displacement, forced migration and genocide. The cumulative result of these circumstances of history has been a great deficit of trust; a lack of bonding to the place where they stay and an uncertainty about how to relate to the government. Consequently, there has not been any widespread demand from the community for securing rights to resources in the manner which has been witnessed in other countries of Asia such as the Philippines or India. Last year I had the unique opportunity to work in Cambodia with both the government and the community. From my experience here, I think that the greatest contribution of the community fisheries initiative of the Royal Government of Cambodia will be in helping to build the social capital in the fishing villages and recreating trust by helping people to work together.

By organizing community fishery organizations in their villages, the people have a unique chance to work together; to explore their newly obtained resources and to take participatory decisions on how they will manage them and earn a sustainable livelihood from them. Building trust between governments and communities is the key to creating

rights and defining responsibilities. As they say in my country, you need two hands to clap.

I spent the last couple of weeks in Aceh Province in Indonesia. As you all know, the fishing communities there have been devastated by the greatest natural calamity in our modern era—the 2004 tsunami. Several fishing communities had over half their population—particularly women and children—devoured by the sea. What humbled me was the phenomenal resilience of those who remain. They are getting on with their lives—looking forward and not deterred by the horrific events of the past. They preferred to consider what happened to them as God's training for them rather than God's punishment. However, though individual lives have been shattered, the social capital in the community has been quickly re-accumulated. Harmony and trust and the will to move ahead marked their attitude. The responsibilities towards one another in the community and to nature are clearly expressed. But yet there is no assertion of rights or plea for co-management. As a plan to rehabilitate the communities in Aceh, the government is keen to consider co-management, but they have yet to make the first steps towards this.

I placed before you these two examples from my brief experience only to highlight the different paths through which governments and communities may arrive at asserting the rights and defining the responsibilities which can lead to co-management initiatives. Perhaps the government officials in Aceh can learn much from the government initiatives in Cambodia. Maybe the communities in Cambodia can learn from the people of Aceh.

In the ICSF this has been our commitment. We believe that bringing people together and assisting them to interact and learn from each other is a major need of our time. We have facilitated this in Africa, in Latin America, in Europe and in Asia. In Asia we have taken many initiatives over the last two decades because more than three-quarters of the fishing communities in the world live here.

Many international agencies have now begun to talk about rights in fisheries. But the focus is largely on property rights at sea and on land. We

at ICSF have talked about rights from the days of the Rome Conference. But our concern for rights extends far beyond the notions of property rights over fish. To us, rights take really substantive meaning only if they extend to all realms of life and livelihood. Many of these are inalienable rights—basic human rights. The right to a dignified life; the right to freedom of expression; the rights to one's cultural and religious practices; the right to collective action to access the natural resources needed to support a livelihood; to name just a few.

In this workshop, we also wish to speak loudly about responsibilities. This is because rights without responsibilities and obligations are futile and empty. Rights without responsibilities are the license for unsustainable actions. This is true both for State and community actions. This is why we need to discuss them as one package or two sides of the same coin.

We know from experience that hoping to achieve this in three days is wishful thinking in Asia because of the large language diversity in the region. But we also know that in Asia this diversity is also our strength because we learn to communicate with our hearts and minds. The shaking of heads; an outburst of disagreement; the hearty laugh; the actions with our hands—all these help to break down language barriers. We will experience much of this in the coming three days. This workshop can only be a beginning. We at ICSF hope that it will light a spark in the minds of those who participate and commit them to create their own visions and missions for asserting rights and defining responsibilities to a new level. This is our hope.

Thank you once again for coming from your countries and making this workshop possible. To make it a success, we must work together for the next couple of days and into the future. 3