

**The Struggles of Fishworkers: New Concerns for Support: The Cebu Conference
(Triennial Conference of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers and the
Tenth Anniversary of the International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters),
Cebu, Philippines, 2-7 June 1994**

Declaration

Final Conference Statement

The Tenth Anniversary of the International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters (Rome Conference) and the Triennial Conference of the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) took place in Cebu, the Philippines, from 2 to 7 June 1994. It was attended by about 100 participants from 31 countries spread across Asia, Africa, the Pacific, Europe and the Americas. The Participants included fishworkers representing important fishworkers' organisations from different countries, social and physical scientists, community organisations and NGO workers.

Almost a decade has gone by since the Rome Conference. This period has seen a rise in clashes at sea and on land between conflicting groups while the growth of the World's fishing fleets has outpaced the regenerative capacity of the seas. Moreover, fishworkers, particularly in the artisanal and small-scale sectors, have yet no guarantee to either resources or their traditional means of livelihood. Undoubtedly, these are disturbing trends which have to be immediately addressed if they are to be reversed.

The theme of the Cebu Conference, "The Struggle of Fishworkers: New Concerns for Support", ought to be located within this perspective. By providing a forum where people directly concerned with these problems could interact and exchange ideas and experiences, the ICSF hoped to promote fresh solutions and support mechanisms. The Conference addressed five different but related topics, namely, coastal environment and fishworkers, fisheries and fishworkers' organizations, technology and energy use in fisheries, transnational linkage in fisheries, and work and social security conditions in fisheries. The Conference adopted the following statement of concerns and recommendations.

Coastal Environment and Fishworkers

Numerous threats to the coastal and marine environment affect the lives and working conditions of fishworkers' communities. These include natural calamities, destruction of mangroves, water pollution, irresponsible tourism, development of coastal infrastructure, destructive fishing techniques, privatization of fisheries resources and deforestation. All of these, in one way or another, may displace fishing communities, affect fishworkers' access to resources and/or damage the resources themselves. They also eliminate jobs, security, income and livelihood. The protection of coastal environments and active mobilization to ensure this are priorities for a sustainable future for small-scale fishworker communities.

Importantly fishworkers' organizations around the world have acted to safeguard their coastal environment. In **Chile**, the Natural Confederation of Artisanal Fishworkers of Chile (CONAPACH) succeeded in having the state Congress declare the Bay of Talcahuano a zone of ecological catastrophe. In **Brazil**, the National Movement of Fishworkers (MONAPE) has launched campaigns against the destruction of extensive zones of the Amazon and the emission of wastewaters in the bays which have destroyed the zones of traditional fishing by artisanal fisherfolk. **Peruvian** fishermen have accused the fishmeal and fishoil industry of polluting the sea. The National Network of Riverine Fishermen of **Mexico** has mobilized opinion against the tourism project of Punta Diamante which has destroyed the bivalve fisheries. In **India**, the National Fishworkers' Forum and environmental groups organized an all-India campaign around the slogan "Protect Waters-Protect Life" to raise awareness about the value of both inland and marine water resources. In **Bangladesh**, fishworkers have been experimenting with a simpler, three-symbol code for better cyclone warning. In **Papua New Guinea**, fishworkers and landowners have got together to force a mining company to build a tailings dam to control the pollutants flowing downstream. In the **Philippines**, fishworkers campaigned for pollution control measures in a geothermal power plant that was causing land, sea and air pollution. In **Indonesia**, fishing communities have fought to prevent the destruction of coral reefs and mangroves.

These examples highlight the potential of organized actions by fishworkers and other resource users for corrective measures in the coastal zones. To be effective, their efforts often need to be supported by technical and legal expertise as well as by social and environmental groups at the national and international levels.

- ICSF should promote and facilitate greater awareness on coastal environment issues affecting fishworker communities as well as help to develop nurture strategies for a sustainable future;
- ICSF should facilitate greater networking among fishworkers' organizations involved in such struggles and also between them and other movements sharing the same concerns;
- ICSF should provide international advocacy for appropriate action against coastal degradation and should document and publicize examples of successful coastal environment management; and
- ICSF should monitor relevant developments concerning negotiations and treaties for the protection of the environment at the international level and inform fishworkers' organizations of these developments.

Fishworkers' Organizations

Fishworkers' organizations refer primarily to the trade unions and cooperatives working in all departments of the fisheries sector. They reflect the diversity of their country's historical experience in terms of social movements and the links with political organizations, aid agencies. Such organizations are often confronted with difficult problems. In some countries, they operate in harsh political contexts where authoritarian rule prevails. In others, a long tradition of narrow dependence on state patronage make it difficult for fishing communities to develop and operate in an autonomous manner.

Although constantly swimming against the tide, several fishworkers' organizations can boost a few significant milestones in their struggle for equity and conservation. In **India**, the fishworkers' movement could wrest from the government a seasonal ban on bottom trawling in the nearshore waters. The South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies an apex body of a network of fishermen's cooperatives has been successfully undertaking credit and fishmarketing, boat-building, development of new technology and servicing of outboard motors.

In **Senegal**, fishworkers have forced the government to establish minimum prices for their disposable catch and for purchase of fishing inputs. In **Canada**, the Maritime Fishermen's Union (MFU) was able to pressurize the government to include inshore fishermen under the legislation for collective bargaining rights. Co-management initiatives between the MFU and the government have resulted in the better management of the lobster fishery.

In the **Philippines**, several fishworkers' organizations have lobbied the government to legislate a new fisheries code that protects the interests of artisanal and small-scale fishermen. The National Federation of Fishworkers' Cooperatives of **Ecuador**, (FENACOPEC) is active in lobbying their government to implement programmes for sustainable management of fisheries resources and for the well-being of fishworkers. In **Chile**, CONAPACH has been able to force changes in government regulations in coastal fisheries. As a result, a five-mile zone has been reserved for small-scale fishermen for cultivation of seaweeds.

One problem that over time threatens all organizations is bureaucracy, which brings a division between leadership and the members. This may be due to an administrative structure where the role of the members is limited. It may be reinforced by the nature of fishing which keeps fishworkers away from home for relatively long periods of time. One way to limit this problem could be to strengthen the role of women in fishworkers' organizations. They can play an important role in the mobilization and accountability of the leadership.

Fishworkers' organizations often face financial problems due to the poverty of their members, to dependency vis-à-vis external donors, and to a lack of understanding of, or interest in, the objectives of these organizations.

As the experience of some fishworkers' organizations reveals, they could overcome this difficulty by undertaking direct sale of fish, supply of inputs into the fishery and by doing consultancy work for government, taking advantage of their basic knowledge of fishing communities and fisheries resources.

Given the rapid resources depletion and degradation in many coastal fisheries, the fishing communities dependent on these resources for their livelihood have an important role to play in the designing, monitoring and enforcement of management strategies.

But they are usually unable to do so for lack of knowledge and effective organizations. The granting of stewardship over the resources is necessary to stimulate greater interest in fishworkers' organizations to undertake resource management.

In an increasing number of countries, fishworkers' organizations have adopted a variety of forms of struggle, ranging from massive public demonstrations, litigation, lobbying and advocacy, to more militant methods. These have often led to concrete achievements such as bans on trawling and the establishment of exclusive zones for artisanal fishing. While these are significant gains, they should be seen only as first steps towards community control over fishery resources, which would also allow, in certain instances, for effective co-management with the state. Whether such control requires that specific quotas be granted to fishermen's organizations and whether these quotas ought to be made transferable are complex questions that deserve to be carefully studied.

The Cebu Conference recommends that:

- Should an international network of fishworkers' organizations emerge, ICSF must support such an initiative through exchanges, strategic information and expertise on fisheries management and technological improvements;
- ICSF should lobby for the interests of fishworkers in international forums like the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations and its organization like the Food and Agriculture Organization;
- ICSF should determine whether aid and development projects jeopardize the livelihood of fishing communities and should forewarn all concerned if these projects interface with the autonomy of fishworkers' organizations;
- ICSF should facilitate regional meetings among fishworkers' organizations to address problems related to the exploitation of shared fishery resources, and other issues of common interest;
- ICSF should help to conduct training programmes for capacity-building of leaders;
- ICSF should continue to support and strengthen the participation of women in fishworkers' organizations, particularly at the decision-making level; and
- ICSF should undertake a programme to consider the viability of various measures (state control, community management, co-management, individual transferable quotas, etc) that are being suggested to ensure better management of fishery resources.

Technology and Energy Use in Fisheries

The development of fishing technology has been influenced by many different factors such as the kind of fishing ground (inshore, offshore, high seas, rivers, lakes, etc), physical aspects of the sea, availability of resources and different levels of demographic pressure. While certain types of technology have been destructive, others have contributed to improve people's lives. Any evaluation of technology, therefore, has to take into consideration these factors.

Small-scale fishworkers have little choice in adopting modern technologies because of factors and interests beyond their control. The case of Canada is an example where bottom-trawling technology has been largely responsible for almost completely destroying one of the largest fish biomass of the world the cod stocks of the Atlantic coast.

This is of specific concern in fisheries because sharp competition under open access conditions compels fishermen to adopt the most effective technology in use, in order to maintain

their relative catching capacity. This technological race not only causes a tremendous waste of energy and capital assets but it is also likely to deplete fishery resources.

Capital-intensive harvesting technologies reduce labour requirements at sea and on shore. They tend to marginalize small-scale fish marketers and women fish processors since the landed quantities are beyond their handling capacity due to limited access to technology, information and credit.

There is increasing international awareness and recognition of the highly destructive capacity of bottom trawling. There is also firm evidence of the negative social and economic impacts of this technique on millions of small-scale fishworkers worldwide, particularly in tropical multi-species fisheries of developing countries.

Equally worrisome is the rapid spread of intensive aquaculture, especially of shrimp, in coastal areas. The negative environmental and socio-economic effects of this monoculture practice are becoming increasingly evident.

The Cebu Conference recommends that:

- ICSF should promote awareness about the economic and social consequences of inappropriate technology choice and inadequate fisheries management. It should assist to set up guidelines for R and D and adoption of suitable technologies;
- ICSF should launch an international campaign to achieve a complete ban on bottom trawling in tropical waters. This requires seeking widespread support from national fishworkers' organizations, environments and consumer groups, especially in developed countries;
- ICSF should strengthen its prevention programme to monitor the impact of intensive coastal aquaculture on small-scale fishworkers and the environment and extend it to the Asian region;
- ICSF should assist interested fishworkers' organizations to access appropriate technology through exchange of information and should raise awareness about the displacement of women as a result of unfair technological developments; and
- ICSF should facilitate continued discussion amongst fishworkers' organizations and help draft and elaborate a general set of agreed criteria against which to measure the social and ecological impacts of fishing technology to determine the acceptability of various technologies.

Transnational Linkages in Fisheries

Two important recent events which are liable to affect the fisheries sector are the new rules of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on liberalization of international trade, on the one hand, and economic liberalization (including adjustments in the exchange rate and the cost of capital) under the aegis of structural adjustment programmes, on the other.

The Cebu Conference expressed concern about the possible effects of these on the fishworkers, including women in fish processing plants. It is a priori difficult to determine what

is the net impact of these changes. Increasingly, fishing agreements provide a means to maintain access to fishing grounds which were historically exploited by long distance fleets off the coasts of developing countries.

These agreements often have undesirable features such as capacity limits but on catch quotas, highly unsatisfactory catch reporting practices by the participating fishing companies, violations of local fisheries regulations, and interference with local artisanal fisheries.

There is a need for better international cooperation and strengthening of support networks, particularly with development NGOs which often have little awareness and knowledge of the specific problems of the fisheries sector.

The Cebu Conference recommends that:

- ICSF should continue to monitor fisheries agreements and assess their impact on fishworkers, lobby for just, fair and transparent agreement conditions, and if requested, support local movements of fishworkers in their struggles against agreements which negatively affect their lives;
- ICSF should monitor the evolving situation of the fishworkers with regard to the impacts of international trade, structural adjustments, and other aspects of international economic policies (especially as they affect food security in certain countries) and promote the exchange of information on these questions among the fishworkers' organizations of different countries;
- ICSF should disseminate information on international fisheries issues, especially those of concern to local fishing communities, to development NGOs, the media and other networks, as well as to established organizations of all types in the maritime sector; and
- ICSF should actively participate in relevant development and environment NGO network and regularly inform fishworkers' organizations of the activities of these networks.

Work and Social Security Conditions in Fisheries

The working conditions on board industrial fishing vessels are often poor due to inadequate facilities and lack of physical safety and social security. There have also been several instances reported where crews on high seas vessels were subjected to severe physical and other human rights abuses.

Flags of convenience are often used to circumvent national and international labour laws. This is particularly the case with regard to vessels involved in high seas fishing. In fish processing factories where most of the workforces are usually women, working conditions are often unsatisfactory and job security is low. Women are known to suffer from work-related health problems.

In artisanal fisheries, drudgery of manual labour, poor navigational and emergency life support aids, bondage to middlemen, and payment of wages / shares at levels below subsistence, dispossession of fishing rights and displacement from traditional fishing sites persist in several

countries. In many developing countries, artisanal fishworkers are not entitled to old age pension and accident benefits.

The Cebu Conference recommends that:

- ICSF should request the creation of adequate national tripartite structures in which boat owners, fishworkers and government can meet to decide on appropriate measures to improve the situation described above;
- ICSF should campaign against the practice of using flags of convenience and for the adherence of all countries to relevant international conventions;
- ICSF should continue to study and raise awareness about women's working conditions in industrial and informal fish processing activities;
- ICSF should lobby ILO to work towards international legislation in support of the working and living conditions of fishworkers, including women in fish processing plants; and
- ICSF should assist national fishworkers' organizations in education campaigns on fishworkers' rights, work and employment conditions, and problems of social security and safety at sea.

Conclusion

In the course of the decade since the Rome Conference, fishworkers have voyaged a considerable distance. The fishworkers' organizations that were formed or strengthened during this period have taken several bold steps to enhance the participation of fishworkers in decision-making processes. They have also undertaken measures for better protection of the coastal environment as well as for improved resource management.

Many of the problems, however, are far from being resolved. Clearly, efforts must continue in this direction to further understand the dynamics of environmental degradation of coastal waters and the inequity of inappropriate technologies. It is imperative to take better cognizance of the implications of new trade regimes, structural adjustment policies and the increasing globalization of fisheries. Viable alternatives have to be explored and adopted.

To enable fishworkers to enter the new millennium with greater hopes of a just and improved livelihood, resulting from better and equitable management of coastal fisheries resources, all the above recommendations of the Cebu Conference need immediate attention.

