

**Asian Fisherfolk Conference  
Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand  
25 to 29 January 2002**

## **Cut Away the Net of Globalization!**

We, the representatives of fisherfolk and peasant organizations and NGO's from 11 countries in Asia – Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam – along with representatives from the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) from Aotearoa – New Zealand and South Africa met from 25 to 29 January 2002 at Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai, Thailand for the Asian Fisherfolk Conference with the theme: Cut Away the Net of Globalization!

We met to discuss the impact of globalization on our lives, both in the marine and inland fisheries sectors. We recognize that globalization processes continue to have severe consequences for our fishing communities. Despite the economic crisis that beset the 'Asian Tiger' economies in the mid-1990s, revealing the pitfalls in the economic policies being pursued by our governments, these policies continue to be promoted, further impoverishing our people. Our governments continue to equate economic growth with development and to use quantitative indicators to measure economic growth, even though these indicators do not reflect the real situation of the people.

Policies of liberalization, deregulation and privatization are being promoted by the three major global powers – the United States (US), Japan and the European Union (EU) – and by multilateral agencies, including the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The main beneficiaries are Transnational Corporations (TNCs) as well as local elites, at the expense of the fisherfolk, workers, peasants, indigenous peoples, women, the Urban poor, the youth and other vulnerable sectors.

These policies have had devastating consequences for artisanal fishing communities within subsistence economies. They have led to loss of income and livelihood, dislocation from fishing grounds, denial of access rights, break-up of communities, social problems, loss of traditional systems of knowledge and wisdom, degradation and destruction of aquatic resources and violations of human rights. Women shoulder the additional burden of having to seek more income and of taking care of their families, frequently by themselves. Fisherfolk continue to have marginal representation in decision-making processes and their dissent and protests are usually met with indifference by governments or the iron hand of the police and the military.

We are, therefore, united in our stand to reject the WTO and fight the systems and structures of globalization. We protest the formation of regional trade blocs like the Asia-

Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) that speed up unequal trade and lead to economic disaster. We call for a reversal of laws, programmes and policies as well as the dismantling of institutions of globalization that are primarily attuned to the interests of powerful economic players and are marginalizing our communities.

**We reaffirm our call** for the sustainable and non-destructive management and use of the resources of the lakes, rivers, seas and oceans by all humankind. We assert that the rights of artisanal fishing communities, the guardians of these water bodies, to use, manage and benefit from them, must be protected and accepted.

**We demand an immediate halt to:**

- Destructive use of fishing gears like trawlers, push nets, anchovy purse seines (using lights), fine-meshed nets and other similarly destructive practices, that deplete aquatic resources, and destroy the very livelihood of artisanal fisheries;
- Fisheries access agreements between countries, as well as joint ventures and other similar arrangement for harvesting and utilizing aquatic resources, that deplete these resources and deprive local fishers of their livelihoods;
- Investments, subsidies and other forms of States support to the industrial and large-scale sector and to non-owner operated mechanized vessels, that have led to overcapacity and overcapitalization;
- Further growth in capacity of domestic industrial fleets in several countries of the Asian region and the export of this overcapacity (through formal and informal means) to waters of neighbouring countries, impacting negatively on artisanal fishers, both of the home country and of the country they fish in;
- Imports of fish and fish products, especially of products harvested / processed locally, that push down prices and impact negatively on incomes and livelihoods of local fishers / processors, including the women;
- Adoption of technologies, programmes and policies that marginalize the role of women in the fisheries sector;
- Export-oriented policies of our governments, often under the compulsion of repaying foreign debts, even as domestic fish supplies stagnate, and sections of the population are malnourished, endangering local food security and sovereignty;
- Export-oriented aquaculture, mariculture, and other similar forms of monoculture, not including traditional aquaculture, that are displacing local communities and destroying their environment;
- Collection of live coral fish and coral reefs for export;
- “Free trade” in fish and fish products, including those promoted through trade blocs like APEC, given the overwhelming evidence from all parts of the world that free trade in natural resources leads to the rapid destruction of resources and of livelihoods of the majority, even as it brings in profits in the short run for a few;
- Big ‘development’ projects, such as construction of dams bunds and barriers that destroy the livelihood of local fishers, both in the inland and marine sectors, displace local communities and destroy local habitats such as mangroves;
- Additional borrowing that goes towards funding big ‘development’ projects and puts countries into a debt trap;

- Development aid that creates conflicts and disunity among local communities.
- The privatization of coastal commons and water bodies through activities like industrial expansion, tourism, aquaculture and the establishment of national parks usually in non-participative ways, that displace local communities and destroy their way of life;
- The privatization of fisheries resources through systems like Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ);
- Polluting activities including indiscriminate use of agrochemicals, mining, dumping and transshipment of toxic and nuclear wastes, that impact negatively on the health of local populations and lead to the degradation of inland and coastal habitats;
- The introduction of exotic species in inland water bodies for aquaculture, a practice that has led to the extinction of local species and impacted negatively on local ecosystems;
- The introduction of genetically modified fish species in our water bodies, even on an experimental basis, in keeping with the internationally agreed 'precautionary principle';
- Violence against small-scale fishers, including destruction of their life and gear by the owners of industrial and commercial fleets;
- Detention of fishermen by neighbouring countries in the Asian region for alleged illegal fishing;
- Human rights violations by the state, in the form of arrests, detentions and other acts of violence against members of fisherfolk organizations and communities;

Accepting that fishing communities are the guardians of the seas, rivers and lakes,

**We commit to:**

- Protecting the rights to life and livelihood of fishing communities;
- Protecting and conserving our aquatic resources, indigenous species and ecosystems, and demonstrating concrete alternatives towards a people-centred development;
- Strengthening fisherfolk organizations, networks and leadership at all levels;
- Strengthening alliances with other marginalized sectors, such as farmers workers and indigenous peoples, in our common struggle;
- Strengthening our networks to actively campaign against the policies of multilateral agencies like the IMF, WB, ADB as well as the WTO, that go against the interests of the fisherfolk and other marginalized groups as well as their cultural contexts;
- Strengthening the participation of women of fishing communities in our organizations and integrating a feminist perspective in our work;
- Keeping abreast and deepening our knowledge of local, national and international issues and processes that impact on fisheries and on our livelihoods;

- Observing World Fisheries Day on 21 November, the Anti-WTO Day on 30 November and the World Food Day on 16 October, at the Asian level with a regionally coordinated action by fishing communities to demonstrate our solidarity.

**We call for and will actively campaign for:**

- Establishing participatory mechanisms to ensure that all decisions related to the use and management of fisheries resources at the local, national and international level are made in partnership with the fisherfolk;
- Mechanisms that increase the accountability to the people of local and national governments as well as of multilateral financial institutions and transnational corporations;
- Formulating appropriate legislations to protect the interest of the artisanal sector and repealing and amending laws, including those at the international level, that go against the interest of the fisherfolk and other marginalized groups, especially indiscriminate bans on small-scale fishing activities;
- Ensuring concrete forms of support, including subsidies, for the small-scale sector and for protecting and enhancing fisheries resources;
- Downsizing the capacity of domestic industrial fleets in the Asian region;
- Developing a comprehensive information base on the small-scale fisheries sector, especially on the work of women, in view of the important, but invisible, role women play in fisheries and in sustaining communities;
- Making resources use decisions based on accurate information about aquatic resources and ecosystems;
- Appropriate mechanisms to be worked out between states in the region for the release of artisanal fishers who drift into the waters of neighbouring countries and face punishments completely disproportionate to their offense;
- An agreement that ensures safety for artisanal fishers who target shared stocks between countries, taking into account traditional rights to access such resources;
- Developing democratic space and freedom for people's movements in all the Asian countries, and actively opposing the introduction of new repressive legislation, under the guise of "anti-terrorism" measures.
- Protection and defense of human, including community rights;

While the fisherfolk in Asia have been meeting since 1978 and reiterating several of the above concerns, our situation has continued to worsen and our resources have continued to decline. This speaks volumes about the failure of governments and international organizations to deal effectively with these issues. This also strengthens our resolve to work collectively towards improving our life and livelihood.

Long live international fisherfolk solidarity!

Cut away the net of globalization!

Advance the peoples' struggles!