

In the name of future generations

The Women's Major Group had the opportunity to present a position paper at the United Nations Ocean's Conference held in New York in June this year

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The Women's Major Group (WMG) was created at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. Since then, the Group has been recognized by the United Nations (UN) in its deliberations on Sustainable Development, and since 1996 in the United Nations Environment Programme. With over 1300 member organizations and networks from every region of the world, the Group has called for joint efforts for the conservation, sustainability and fair use of ocean resources; a defence of the Commons; and careful attention to social, economic and ecological sustainability in all oceans-related decisions arising from the first ever United Nations Ocean Conference held in New York between 5 and 9 June 2017.

On behalf of the WMG, I presented a Position Paper at the Plenary Session of the UN General Assembly on 7 June 2017, outlining the Group's demand to safeguard the rights and responsibility of the people of the seas and ocean, and calling for respect of all cultures, diverse voices and ways of life, without placing economic interests as the central or sole concern.

The full text of the Position Paper is given below:

As women from all over the world, and represented by the Women's Major Group made up of over 1300 groups and networks from every region, we recognize the importance and timeliness of this meeting. We must join efforts towards the conservation, sustainability and fair use of our ocean resources, defend the Commons, and ensure that we are paying careful attention to social, economic and ecological sustainability in all oceans-related decisions arising from this conference, and in future processes.

This UN Ocean Conference process provides an important venue to broaden UN discussions on oceans through a transformative approach that is sufficient to

the unprecedented challenges our planet faces in coming decades. Specifically, such conferences must serve as a useful political space to raise issues such as ridge-to-reef approaches, global marine governance, impacts of deep-sea mining and nuclear waste, impacts of economic partnership agreements and trade agreements on fisheries, the impact on distant-water fisheries on local communities, the need to move quickly to fossil-free futures, gender justice and women's human rights and universal human rights related to oceans, indigenous peoples' rights to free prior and informed consent, and the need to protect long agreed sustainable principles of common but differentiated responsibilities.

In fulfillment of a key conference objective—to “share experiences gained at the national, regional, and international levels in the implementation of Goal 14”—delegates must surely articulate linkages both between SDG 14 and other relevant goals, especially SDG 5, on gender and also on health, economics, climate change, and means of implementation. We especially call for increased clarity on intergovernmental processes following this conference and coherence with overall HLPF (High-level Political Forum) and other multilateral processes, with substantive engagement of civil society, major groups and other stakeholders, especially women and girls from all regions.

Humanity has today the potential of addressing the structural issues rooted in an inequitable world but we sadly do not yet see this clearly and strongly reflected in this first conference. As Women's Major Group representatives, we continue to assert the importance of challenging structural barriers to really recognize the fulfillment of SDG 14 as a core part of Agenda 2030, and work with all governments and stakeholders to ensure this occurs.

The ocean and its coasts are givers of life—life that provides wealth and richness but, as the Ministry of Agriculture of Costa Rica (Minister Arauz) mentioned yesterday, we have both immense wealth in the oceans,

and immense poverty on the coast. Ocean wealth is not translating into well-being for coastal communities. A few get most of the profit from the oceans, thus encouraging the overexploitation of the oceans by both large- and small-scale fisheries. This is occurring in a context where we have crossed several planetary boundaries, already severely damaged and dying coral reefs, sea-level rise and decline of water lens and waterways, major pollution on land and in oceans, and with major changes already to marine biodiversity.

We must clearly convey the rights and responsibility of the people of the seas and ocean, respect all cultures, respect diverse voices, and respect their ways of life without placing economic interests as the central or sole concern.

On this planet with one shared ocean, nearly half of our population lives in poverty and collectively holds the same wealth as just eight men. This horrific fact underpins our urgent demand to tackle systemic barriers and structural inequalities, including neoliberal capitalism, fundamentalisms, racism and

patriarchy, that cause and exacerbate such unimaginable inequalities. It also requires addressing issues of militarism, corporatisation of governance and their influence of multilateral processes, consumption and production, inequalities within and between states, and shrinking civil society space.

We assert that SDG 14 is indivisible from other SDG goals. Gender inequality (SDG 5) must be addressed in order to change one of the most pervasive inequalities evidenced by predominant extractive industrial agricultural and fisheries models that are not sustainable, and favour large agri-businesses and distant-water fisheries, while pushing out small farmers and artisanal fisherpeople, a majority of whom are women who typically employ more sustainable practices.

We need now a quick and just transition towards true democratization and a human rights based approach to SDG 14 implementation that explicitly recognizes the human rights of small-scale fishing communities, including women, to participate in, and take responsibility for, integrated management of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture.

WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP (WMG)



Vivienne Solis presenting a Position Paper on behalf of WMG at the Plenary Session of the UN General Assembly on 7 June 2017, New York. We must join efforts towards the conservation, sustainability and fair use of our ocean resources as well as defend the Commons

A memorable address

Representing a fishing community from India, Lisba Yesuda delivered a Plenary Session address at the United Nations Ocean Conference

By Friends of Marine Life team, India

A memorable highlight of the United Nations Ocean Conference, held in New York from 5 to 9 June, 2017, was an address delivered at the plenary by Lisba Yesuda, a young woman from a fishing community in India who spoke on behalf of Friends of Marine Life (FML), an indigenous coastal community voluntary organization.

Lisba began by describing the environmentally significant work being done by FML, which includes conducting seabed ecosystem studies over a 3000 sq. km area in South India. She stated that in India only one per cent of marine protected areas have been identified, far lower than the estimated coverage, and pointed out the importance of such seabed ecosystem studies in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14: Conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources.



Lisba stated that their organization has been working with UNESCO-IPBES Asia Pacific region to document, and disseminate information about, the bio-cultural diversity of coastal fishing communities including its language and oral traditions.

Towards the promotion of sustainable fisheries, she urged for the implementation of suitable control measures via marine policy and blue economy initiatives, and pointed out that fishers should be encouraged to follow responsible fishery practices. Finally, she urged that the indigenous and local knowledge of coastal communities be incorporated with due diligence into solutions for sustainable fisheries and conservation. 📌

While we recognize the number of voluntary commitments coming into the conference, we still see very little recognition by all stakeholders of the input of women of all ages into this SDG 14 approach, and few affirmative actions that will rebalance unequal power structures and unfair gendered norms relating to oceans.

We urge you, in the name of future generations and *buen vivir*, to move on to accountability with strength by defining clear indicators that enable us to sail from today with speed, equity and fairness, and speaking

the truth of where we are, and where we must go from here.

In the case of Costa Rica, CoopeSoliDar R.L., the local organization that I represent, and as part of our global Women's Major Group network, we recognize and call for more concrete initiatives, such as our adoption of the Guidelines for the Sustainability of Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) as a powerful instrument to advance issues related to human rights approaches: governance, gender equality,

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climate change, food and water security and sovereignty, and more just markets.

We reiterate the need to:

- Recognize universal human rights, and the rights and free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women in all their diversity
- Ensure safety of environmental and women human rights defenders
- Safeguard bodily autonomy, end violence against women, and enhance respect for girls and women of all ages, including by respecting, protecting and fulfilling sexual and reproductive health and rights
- Mainstream gender equality and women's human rights
- Recognize the importance of small-scale fisheries and associated coastal communities in integrated management and securing food security and other benefits from coastal areas, and fully implementing the intent of SDG target 14B
- Move urgently to those social, economic and ecological policies and practices, including no new fossil fuels leaving the ground, and end exploitative and extractivist agriculture and fisheries practices through a just transition to low-carbon and truly sustainable economies.

We need to ensure the strongest human rights based approach and that the conservation and truly sustainable management of the ocean, air and land is at the centre of all our discussions in this conference and strongly reflected in all intergovernmental processes.

We call upon all of you to move on towards concrete actions that will recuperate the ocean spirit for all, and especially for those who need it the most. Oceans are our common heritage and we have the common responsibility—within the options in all our hands—to save them for ourselves and future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide WMG vision and views to this first and urgent Ocean Conference. 🌊