

# THE DIFFICULT ROAD TO RIO

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The Rio de Janeiro conference has awakened great hope throughout the world. Its results could also lead to great frustration if government representatives fail to reach a practical agreement to solve the serious environmental problems facing our planet.

The preparatory meetings of the United Nations and the seminars, conferences and publications by governments, research centres, civil organizations and social movements have shown that the road to Rio is difficult, owing to the quantity and gravity of the political, environmental and economic problems that have been detected.

Even though environmental problems and their solutions can be detected and quantified, it is difficult to understand the rigidity of the governments of rich countries in blocking overall solutions proposed in international fora. Negotiations in those meetings do not follow the recommendations of scientists nor the agreements of the social groups affected. Instead, they satisfy the short-term economic interests of the rich countries.

Who will pay the debt for the environment? Who has caused the damage? The answers heard in meeting rooms and hallways hide the truth: the modern industrial development style, invented in the countries of the north and extended to the south, has polluted our planet and led to weather changes, the hole in the ozone layer, exhaustion of natural resources, impoverishment of millions of people and a political and social situation marked by wars between different countries and abhorrent social and economic inequalities.

Therefore, responsibility for paying the environmental debt should be shared and proportional for those who polluted more than others, in order to seek solutions that are more harmonious for peoples as well as for their relation to their environment, in a perspective of long-term sustainability. This is difficult in practice, due to the high cost involved and resistance to the changes that must take place in current production and consumption patterns. Responsibility for these changes should also be shared by the governments and civil society of the less developed countries. A tremendous contradiction has been revealed in the preparatory meetings for the Earth Summit, as this conference has come to be called. Humanity is fully aware of the risky situation which threatens to collapse its environment, yet it is prevented from moving

radically to solve the problem because of a lack of decision on the part of the industrialized countries unwilling to pay the bill for the damage they caused.

Fishermen live from the resources of the sea and different bodies of water. Coastal and marine areas are known to be vitally important both economically and ecologically for a large part of the population of the planet. These areas are subject to overexploitation and competition, due to short-term demands, especially from the rich countries, such as Europe, Japan and the United States, who normally do not produce enough fishery products and are willing to pay high prices in third world countries to obtain them.

The oceans and continental waters are being polluted from land-based sources such as urban, chemical, agricultural, pesticide and mining effluents, seriously endangering the survival of human beings and the species of those waters, and mainly their diversity. Certain ecosystems are in danger of being destroyed, which would mean the disappearance of species whose nutritional value and potential for medicine and industry are still unknown. Weather changes brought on by the emission of gases like methane, carbon dioxide or CFC can raise the level of the sea and provoke enormous catastrophes by flooding and the destruction of aquacultural areas, plankton and marine productivity.

These facts are known and have been sufficiently denounced by scientists, ecological associations and international agencies that deal with these issues. What we want to show in this article and this issue of SAMUDRA is the role that fishermen and their organizations have played in defending the environment and their rights as professionals, by making their concerns known to governments and opening up roads to request respect for their concerns and satisfaction for their demands.

During the meetings of the preparatory committee of the conference, ICSF presented different viewpoints that were accepted and incorporated in draft documents, eventually becoming a proposal that summarized these demands and that, if adopted, will serve as a platform for the struggles of national and regional organizations.

The proposed Plan of Action, called Agenda 21, contains a special chapter on the protection of the oceans and types of seas, including closed and semi-

fishing. To do so, they should:

- integrate the development of small-scale artisanal fishing into planning for marine and coastal areas, taking into account the interests of fishermen, workers in small-scale processing operations, women, local communities and indigenous populations, by encouraging representation, of these groups where possible, even ensuring that in negotiations and the implementation of international agreements the interests of local communities and indigenous populations are taken into account, especially their right to subsistence;

closed seas, coastal areas, and the protection and rational use and development of their living resources. Points C and D of that chapter present a series of statements that provide a basis for what ICSF has called the Charter of the Basic Rights of the Artisanal Fishermen and Fishworkers of the World.

- The state of the marine environment is generally recognized, especially with reference to the handling of living resources through uncontrolled fishing, overcapitalization, oversized fleets and the use of insufficiently selective fishing methods; also, the use of the sea as a dumping grounds for all kinds of land-based urban, industrial, agricultural and mining pollution.
- It is imperative that states commit themselves to conserve and use living resources in a sustainable manner, in order to meet the nutritional needs of human beings, maintain and restore populations of species, promote the creation and use of selective fishing methods, conserve endangered species and habitats and promote scientific research on these resources.
- States should also take into account in their production and managerial systems the traditional knowledge and interests of local communities, small-scale fishermen and autochthonous populations. They should also develop the potential of living marine resources by preparing inventories for their conservation and sustainable use.
- Special emphasis is placed on having coastal states support the sustainability of small-scale artisanal

- recognize the rights of those involved in small-scale fishing and the special situation of indigenous populations and local communities, including their rights to use and protect their habitat on a sustainable basis;

- establish systems to acquire and record traditional knowledge about living resources and the marine environment, and promote the incorporation of that knowledge into management systems.

- With regards aquaculture, it is recommended that the possibilities offered by marine and coastal areas under national jurisdiction be analysed; that adequate safeguards be applied in order to introduce new species, and that educational, financial and technical cooperation be developed to increase this activity together with small-scale fishing.
- A special recommendation is made about the need to recognize and protect marine ecosystems with high levels of biodiversity and productivity, especially corral reefs, estuaries, temperate and tropical wetlands, including mangroves, oyster and algae beds and other areas of reproduction and growth. A request is made to establish limits and define protected areas.

The Charter of the Rights of Fishermen summarizes the proposals of Agenda 21 in an easily understood fashion. Our hope is that they gradually become the ideas that inspire the struggles of organizations to recover their dignity and achieve the recognition that is due to fishworkers for their contribution to the survival of families and the environment in which we live.