

Fishermen's rights

Filipino fishermen have suffered a great deal on Taiwanese boats. Living conditions on those boats were denounced at the international seminar held in Manila last February. All over the world, unknown fishermen undergo the same or worse treatment and have no way to defend their basic rights. International agencies and governments do little or nothing to solve these problems.

Industrial fleets have hurt small artisanal fishermen in numerous countries, either directly by fishing in their waters, or indirectly, by negotiating with governments to obtain larger fishing quotas. Many national organizations aspire to have a zone reserved for artisanal fishermen, and we can see the day when that right will be universally accepted as a norm.

Women do not participate in organizations and are generally kept in an inferior position. Even though they always participate in the task of processing the catch, they are not allowed to occupy leadership positions. Also, governmental decision-making agencies do not accept the participation of fishworkers' leaders, who are therefore forced to use pressure tactics to be taken into account.

We can see some signs on the horizon that allow us to hope for a better day for fishworkers who lack basic rights. Chile has promulgated a law for fishing and aquaculture, which provides for the participation of representatives of fishermen's organizations in fishing councils. It also establishes a five-mile zone reserved for artisanal fishing, a fisheries development fund, and priority access to aquacultural concessions. Fishermen from Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Bolivia, Colombia, Senegal, the Philippines, India, Norway, France and other countries are active in their organizations to achieve better living and working conditions.

This progress marks the beginning of a long and difficult road that fishermen's organizations will have to travel to ensure that their members are respected as human beings and can defend their sources of work threatened by pollution and plunder. Fishermen and fishworkers of the entire world should raise their voices to make room for the participation of women and demand from their governments reserved fishing areas. Credit and technical assistance should be channelled through projects that are elaborated with the active participation of fishermen themselves at every step of the process.

Since 1984 the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers has carried out numerous actions to defend those brothers who live and work at sea. At every event and in every publication, we have always called attention to violations of the human and professional rights of fishworkers. SAMUDRA today denounces the bad treatment that many Filipino and fishermen from other countries undergo in the Taiwanese fleet. We are sure that a response of solidarity will come to their support from every corner of the globe. The Collective is also working on a proposal for the next United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, so that the basic rights of fishermen and fishworkers are recognized.

For that reason, the "2001 Award", granted to the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers by the European coordinating body for non-governmental organizations accredited by the European Communities Commission, is a recognition of efforts made and a demand for more responsibility in the future.

Finally, we would like to thank Francois Bellec for his collaboration in launching our review as its editor in Brussels, Belgium. His work allowed us to move our message across borders. Pierre Gillet, after five years of dedicated service, has turned over his position as ICSF's executive secretary to Sebastian Matthew, headquartered in Madras, India. This edition brings you the salutations of the new team. We need your collaboration and news.

Héctor Luis Morales
Editor-in-Chief