

CECAF session

A newcomer's appeal

At its first-ever participation in a meet of the FAO Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic Fishery (CECAF), ICSF put forth its concerns

We would like to thank the FAO for allowing the ICSF to participate in this meeting, the 14th session of CECAF. It is the first time that our organization has attended such a meeting, and I would like to begin by giving a brief description of who we are.

The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers is an international NGO. It was founded in 1986 by a global network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists working in close association with fishworkers' organizations. ICSF works mainly with, and in support of, fishworkers and their organizations, with a focus on small-scale and artisanal fisheries in the South.

Over the last eight years, ICSF has actively participated in a number of policy processes geared towards establishing the new international legal and policy framework in fisheries. This has included participation in the preparation of Chapter 17 of Agenda 21, the UN Agreement on the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks and the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

Since it was founded, ICSF has also been taking an active interest in West African fisheries. Our experience to date has convinced us that a regional approach to management, development and conservation is the most promising way to ensure the sustainability of fishery resources. In this regard, we feel that both formal and informal regional organizations have an important role to play in establishing such an approach.

We are, therefore, delighted to be able to participate here in this CECAF meeting.

We would like to take this opportunity to raise a number of issues which relate to the topics under discussion at this meeting.

1. We are very pleased that the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries has been included as a separate item on the agenda. ICSF was one of the few NGOs which took an active part in the processes which led to the production of this instrument, and we are keen to see that it is widely implemented. We feel that it is highly relevant to the sustainable management and development of fisheries in West Africa, where resource allocation issues, regulation of fishing effort, and sustainable development need to be afforded a high priority.

2. With regard to the establishment of fishing zones (under Item 4 of the agenda), we feel that Article 6.18 of the FAO Code of Conduct, which deals with the preferential access rights of the artisanal fisheries, is of particular relevance. The establishment of exclusive zones within the 12-mile territorial limits (as defined by UNCLOS) for artisanal fishing activities would go a long way in protecting fish stocks from destructive and non-selective industrial fishing practices, and would, at the same time, contribute to sustaining local fish supplies and food security.

3. We would like to express our concern over the recent Decree No. R561 of the Mauritanian government which establishes a closed season for the industrial pelagic fishery. While this initiative is to be welcomed as a serious conservation measure, we regret that vessels fishing under fishery access agreements are exempted from it. These vessels are the main protagonists of the industrial pelagic fishery in Mauritanian waters, and unless they are required to observe the closed season, its effectiveness

as a conservation measure will be severely diminished. Such a ruling also establishes a dangerous precedent for other fisheries.

4. We also feel that the emphasis given by this meeting to international and regional trade is highly important. However, we feel that it needs to be emphasized that in many countries, both the artisanal and industrial sectors target export species. In my own country, Senegal, the artisanal sector contributes more than 40 per cent of the fish destined for exports, and over 50 per cent of the needs of the fish processing industry. Thus, while the industrial fisheries may primarily target high-value industrial species for export in order to meet their high operating costs, the artisanal fleet has a more diversified capacity to supply fish to meet the needs of local, regional and international markets. In this regard, we feel that with appropriate infrastructure development, the artisanal sector would be well placed to provide the supplies of pelagic fish for sale in urban and upcountry areas (Item 7 on the agenda). As the artisanal sector is already providing large quantities of these species, and there is a long history of their involvement in supplying local markets, surely it would make more sense to invest in artisanal fisheries development than in new industrial fisheries.

5. In this regard, we would like to underscore the potential impact of non-tariff barriers (like health, hygiene

and sanitation restrictions) which, as highlighted recently by the FAO Subcommittee on Fish Trade, can be severe. In this context, we feel that the development of regional trade should be afforded a high priority, and fully endorse the proposal to harmonize rules and regulations governing trade. We feel that placing too great a dependency on international export markets outside the region would not be an appropriate strategy.

6. We also feel that the issue of international fishery access arrangements needs some careful consideration. At one level, the revenues obtained from foreign vessels fishing in African waters may generate foreign exchange earnings, but miss out on the benefits of adding value locally. With such arrangements, development possibilities are also restricted, where fisheries are essentially economic enclaves delinked from other sectors. We feel that greater emphasis needs to be placed on linking such fishery arrangements to other local economic sectors, for example, by insisting on local landing provisions and by channelling revenue earned from licensing arrangements directly into local fisheries development.

7. We share the concern over resources expressed in CECAF's Paper No 4: Fisheries Development issues and Trends. There would seem to be a great deal of evidence

to show that demersal stocks in West African waters are overfished, there is a need to restrict trawling activities in many areas.

8. We would also like to express concerns over the way that pelagic resources are being managed and exploited. They are particularly vulnerable to both natural and human influences. Subject to wide fluctuations in abundance, they are also under increasing levels of fishing pressure from local and international industrial fishing effort. Although comprising a number of species, they are often treated as a single stock for management purposes. Given the importance of these species in meeting nutritional needs in any CECAF countries, we feel that the access of industrial fishing needs to be closely controlled, and that more sources need to be applied to understanding the population dynamics and migration patterns of the individual species which make up these pelagic stocks. In particular, the seasonal movement of these species across national boundaries, their spawning seasons and locations, and the impact of fishing effort on stock size needs to be studied.

9. We welcome the attention being given to issues of safety at sea. With the rapid development of artisanal fisheries, and the search for new fishing grounds further offshore, there is increasing loss of life due both to arduous sea conditions and the interactions between industrial and artisanal vessels. We feel that as well as addressing the symptoms of this problem (increasing support to search and rescue operations, etc.), there is also a need to have a clearer understanding of the underlying causes of increasing accident rates. This will shed further light on how to address this serious problem more comprehensively, particularly the dynamics of the often violent interactions among industrial, semi-industrial and artisanal fishing craft, gear and crew. ¶

This Statement was submitted by Aliou Sall on behalf of ICSF to the 14th Session of the FAO Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic Fishery at Nouakchott, Mauritania. 6-9 September 1998