

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

IPC WORKING GROUP ON FISHERIES STATEMENT

We, in the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), represent small-scale fisher peoples including Indigenous Peoples from the four global movements, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP), the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) and La Via Campesina (LVC). Our constituencies span across the entire world and both from coastal and inland fishing communities.

Today, we celebrate Human Rights Day, on the same day the United Nations General Assembly adopted, in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR is a milestone document, which proclaims the inalienable rights that everyone is entitled to as a human being, such as: equity and equality, non-discrimination, consultation and participation, human dignity and the right to food. It is on those same human rights and human rights principles that the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication were developed.

This year's Human Rights Day theme is equality and non-discrimination, as clearly stated by Article 1 of the UDHR: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". But the human rights of small-scale fishers and fisher people are far from being fulfilled and at present are threatened particularly by the Blue Economy Agenda and Climate Change and Disasters.

In the last decades, the Blue Economy Agenda has spread globally and it is now a pillar of the development programmes of many countries across the world. But in the Blue Economy Agenda, SSF people are put to the side and there is no space for human rights; all there is exclusion and marginalisation.

Under the Blue Economy, SSF people have seen their rights slowly fade away and laws and regulations being softened by national institutions to favour the interest of corporate investments. The IPC witnessed the failure of the national institutions to adhere to the fundamental principle of inclusive and democratic decision making, where custodians of coastal and inland livelihoods participate in decisions relating to natural and food resources. National institutions, who are obliged to protect human rights do not respect the right to free, prior, informed consent and of proper information.

All this is justified in the name of national interest and development, but there can't be development where human rights are neglected. States fail to fully implement the SSF Voluntarily Guidelines and abide by their international human rights obligations, resulting in rights violation and negative impact on food sovereignty, food security, and sustainable use and management of natural resources.

Fisher women continue facing unequal access to resources, information, markets and benefits and are excluded from policy discussions and public spaces as they're not considered significant contributors to the fishing activity. Their role in SSF is too often disregarded, although predominant in the post-harvest activities, and essential in many other aspects of small-scale fisheries.

Under the Blue economy, Indigenous small-scale fishers and fishing communities have witnessed the erosion of their cultures, traditional knowledge and livelihoods that are strongly connected to the waters and fisheries. Fishing communities are the biggest depending of coastal and inland aquatic resources, they are knowledge holders and rights holders to coastal and ocean livelihoods. Communities, who are custodians of and dependent on natural resources, are being dispossessed from their livelihoods, thus condemned to poverty, food insecurity and cultural loss. Their customary rights are ignored and the ecosystems of which they are custodians are destroyed and polluted by the same industrial activities that are part of the national sustainable development plans, because there's no space for nature and human rights in the Blue Economy, as the only rules it follows are that of the market.

We, therefore, call upon the international community to listen to our concerns and support Small Scale Fishers Peoples' rights and needs as espoused in the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines).

We call on Governments to guarantee the human rights of small-scale fishers and support fish workers' organisations and movements in realising their human rights and living needs. We ask them to recognise SSF people as crucial rights holders in all the processes regarding the ocean, the coast and inland marine resources as these decisions have an impact on their livelihoods and survival.

We ask Governments to recognise and respect the rights of Indigenous peoples and small-scale fisheries communities in the access to land, water, and local markets as stated in the Voluntary Guideline on The Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forest in The Context Of National Food Security. We call on the Government to protect the knowledge and know-how of SSF people and Indigenous Communities and avoid any action or policies that deprive people of existing access to food or food producing sources. We encourage them to incorporate the principles of the SSF Guidelines into national public policy and strengthen their implementation.

We encourage the international community to embrace the Human Rights Based Approach and its five key human rights principles: Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and Equality, Empowerment and Legality.

On its part, the IPC Working Group on Fisheries will continue to build international solidarity and reinforce the Global Movements. The Group commit to use the political spaces in which it is active at regional and international level to promote the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries and fill the knowledge gap on it.

The Group commits to hold the duty bearers accountable for their obligation to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights and for the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, for which the IPC is presently elaborating a people-centred monitoring framework. We will work to empower Fishers Peoples and Indigenous Peoples as right holders to claim the rights they are entitled to and give them back their auto determination and decision-making power.

We highlight the fundamentality of our participation in governance processes, particularly at these times, for getting us all through the Covid-19 pandemic and to face continuous climate disasters that mainly affect fishers' lives and livelihoods.

We seize the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA 2022) as a crucial moment to reassert the rights of small-scale fisherwomen and fishermen and Indigenous Peoples to secure Food Sovereignty.

On this Human Rights Day, we in the IPC, pledge to fight for a just system where the rights of fisher communities are visibly responded to.