



35th COFI General Statement IPC Fisheries Group

We, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), La Via Campesina (LVC), as members of the Fisheries Group of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), and representing millions of small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples from coastal and inland regions worldwide, are happy to once again be able to participate in-person in the COFI. This has not been possible since 2018 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This 35th COFI is particularly important, as 2022 is the **International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAFA)**. IPC is the co-chair of the IYAFA Steering Committee, and we have been inspired to see so many important initiatives that have been established this year in support of small-scale fishers' organizations and communities around the world. We would like to acknowledge FAO's crucial support on several of these initiatives.

Despite the many challenges caused by the pandemic, including having to rely on connecting via online meetings, the **IPC has been working hard to strengthen and expand its network** and maintain momentum around the implementation of the *Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines)*. The IPC has continued to collaborate closely with the FAO in the Global Strategic Framework in support of the implementation of SSF Guidelines (SSF-GSF), within which IPC is part of the Advisory Group. The IPC's Regional Advisory Groups (RAGs) have also been actively engaging with members at the regional level in order to build capacity, strengthen broader connections, and develop concrete regional strategies. We urge COFI through the FAO, to provide strong, active support to these RAGs.

The IPC has also developed a **people-centred methodology** for monitoring the implementation of the SSF Guidelines, involving a bottom-up process led by fishers' organizations and coastal communities themselves. A first assessment report has already been produced, including contributions from 21 countries around the world. This report was launched to coincide with IYAFA. This is just the beginning, and the IPC is committed to continuing to collect inputs and expanding upon this work in the coming two years, in order to share a more comprehensive report in time for the 36th COFI session in 2024. COFI 36 marks a particularly important milestone – the 10th anniversary of COFI's endorsement of the SSF Guidelines – and the IPC looks forward to seeing the Guidelines implementation process scaled up in the next two years in celebration of this milestone.

We have just emerged from 2 days of preparatory meetings, and 3 days of the IYAFA Small-Scale Fisheries Summit here in Rome. The successful SSF Summit, organized as a collaboration between the IPC, the GFCM, the SSF Hub and the FAO, provided a space for discussion and strategy-building between SSF organizations, NGOs and researchers from around the world. Through our discussions

over these 5 days, we have pinpointed several key issues we would like to highlight. We would like to see future collaborations between IPC and FAO to **organize Small-Scale Fisheries Summits** in the next two years and beyond.

First, there continues to be a **lack of recognition for small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples** and the challenges they face. These challenges are too often ignored, while small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples are left out of decision-making processes that directly affect our lives and livelihoods. This lack of recognition should be addressed as a matter of urgency by states to ensure equal participation in decision-making processes in all areas affecting SSF – including policy formulation, pre- and postharvest activities, and the management of territories and resources. Fishing communities and Indigenous Peoples should also have access to social protection and insurances, allowing them to enjoy and engage in secure livelihoods. Particular support and protection should be given to youth working in fisheries, in order to ensure generational renewal in the sector, by creating spaces for youth training and participation, and supporting the development of a sector in which young people see a future in fisheries that enables them to stay in and contribute to their communities.

Second, **women working in fisheries** continue to be marginalized and do not enjoy equal rights in the sector. Evidence from our SSF Guidelines monitoring report shows that the rights of women are severely compromised by structural factors. The lack of recognition of women's labour in both domestic and reproductive work, as well as in the entire fisheries value chain, is a major barrier to gender equity and equality. Women's roles and contributions to the sector must be formally and legally recognized, and spaces opened for them to participate in decision-making processes at local, national and international levels. Access to social protection and good and safe working conditions must also be ensured for women, in order for them to be able to live in dignity and continue to actively contribute to their communities.

Third, small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples continue to lose **access to fishing territories and resources**. Fishers and Indigenous Peoples are experiencing the increasing expropriation of fisheries resources in inland and marine territories globally. This is caused by port construction, shipping, industrial aquaculture expansion, overfishing by large-scale industrial fleets, resources wasted through by-catch, mining, oil and gas, wind energy projects, dams in rivers, tourism, real estate development, and exclusionary protected areas established under the false pretence of conservation. These developments are too often carried out without sufficient consultation with communities, using a top-down approach stemming from colonial legacies. This continuing legacy makes it increasingly urgent to adhere to the UN General Assembly Resolution HRC48/7 to reduce the negative impacts of colonialism on the enjoyment of human rights. Tenure rights must be restored in situations where SSF communities have been dispossessed from land and water territories without free, prior and informed consent. Small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples, rather than economic actors, must be given priority in accessing coastal waters, particularly within the 200 nautical mile zone. States should avoid false solutions, such as exclusionary Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), and instead take effective measures to restore the legitimate traditional, customary, or Indigenous tenure rights of fishing communities and redistribute such rights where they have been infringed upon.

As hunger and malnutrition continue to increase globally – particularly in small-scale food producing communities – the growth of industrial and export oriented **aquaculture** is presented as a solution to the food crisis. In the interest of aquaculture development, transnational

corporations – supported by national level policy reforms and subsidies – continue to grab our land and water territories and fisheries resources. The volumes of wild capture fish and plant based products, such as soy, that is needed to feed the fast growing aquaculture industry is simply not sustainable. Further, the export-oriented value chain, feeding mainly middle income and rich consumers, does not provide food for our communities. Energy consumption for the production of feed and transport of commodities is also out of sync with the global climate goals. It is on these grounds that we disagree with the claim that industrial aquaculture is a sustainable solution to the food crisis. We therefore call upon COFI members to seriously reconsider plans to expand industrial aquaculture, and instead work with us, small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples, to support and advance localised SSF value chains, which can provide healthy and affordable food for communities. We also call upon our governments to roll back harmful aquaculture projects and restore our traditional and customary rights to territories and fish resources.

We note with concern the proposal to establish a **Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management**, which would include a standing agenda item on small-scale fisheries. We are concerned that such a sub-committee will not be able to address the overarching issues related to small-scale fisheries, which are much broader in scope than just management – including social development, human rights, and tenure rights in marine and inland fisheries. Small-scale fisheries issues are closely connected to almost all COFI agenda items, and should therefore be maintained as a stand-alone item in the main COFI sessions. The COFI plenary involves the highest level of participation of both member states and observers, including the IPC – the largest global network of small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples participating in the COFI process. Of the 5 options proposed by the Joint Task Force (JYT), we encourage the committee to choose the second option: *to enhance the utilization of existing bodies, including COFI and the two existing sub-committees*. As the most important global forum for policy debate in fisheries, the role of COFI as the main platform for diverse actors to engage and discuss small-scale fisheries issues, must be strengthened and enhanced.

We, as food producers, need support from our states in the form of **direct and indirect subsidies**. We are therefore alarmed that the WTO has been given the mandate to negotiate fishery subsidies. WTO is not only undemocratic, it also does not pay due consideration to human rights, cultural and social development, and its free trade agenda has led to the further concentration of resources in the hands of transnational corporations. We therefore call upon states to bring back discussions on fishery subsidies to the FAO and COFI, to ensure Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing is addressed in a democratic manner, and where we have an opportunity to participate in negotiations. We also call upon states to reallocate subsidies, which will be phased out of the industrial sector, to small-scale artisanal fisheries in order to ensure we have adequate support to continue to maintain our livelihoods and provide food for the global population.

The very existence of our communities is under threat due to **climate change, environmental destruction and pollution**. Rising water levels and temperatures, drought, decreasing fish stocks, changing fish migratory patterns, floods, and the increased frequency of storms are just some of the impacts of climate change affecting small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples. There is a need for more scientific research on how these impacts are affecting small-scale fisheries. Development projects, such as converting mangroves into shrimp farms, or mining in coastal and inland areas, are destroying our natural habitats, and mercury and pesticides are accumulating in our environments and poisoning our fish and our peoples. Technological fixes, carbon trading schemes, and the 30x30 conservation agenda will not address the core of these problems. There is also no

evidence that the voluntary targets and commitments delivered as part of the SDG agenda will bring much-needed results. The governance model advanced by the SDGs is eroding the roles and responsibilities of our states, and instead providing leverage for transnational corporations, international environmental organizations, and other powerful actors, to influence governance at all levels. We cannot support this form of multistakeholderism. We call upon our governments to implement plans and projects for the reparation and protection of nature. The impacts of climate change should be addressed by states on the basis of knowledge, information and solutions as articulated by fishing communities, Indigenous Peoples and our organizations. The states have a responsibility to act urgently to ensure our communities can continue to co-exist with nature, and to take seriously and support our calls for climate justice.

Finally, we reiterate our **commitment to working closely with governments and the FAO**, as part of the SSF-GSF Advisory Group and the Regional Advisory Groups, to implement the SSF guidelines at the national level. The SSF-GSF is a crucial mechanism that enables direct participation and collaboration between civil society, FAO and governments in the SSF Guidelines process. We call upon the FAO and the COFI members to continue to support the SSF-GSF, and renew their commitment to strengthening this mechanism by allocating appropriate funds and technical support. We also welcome the renewed commitment of the governments of Canada, Indonesia, Norway, Peru and Tanzania to the SSF-GSF Friends of the Guidelines, and we invite other governments to join this group. Their role is crucial in setting an example for all other governments and actors involved in implementing the SSF Guidelines.

We will also continue to engage with in other political processes, such as the UN Decade on Family Farming, emphasising crucial cross-collaborations and synergizing processes that seek to protect the rights of small-scale food producers. Now is the time to take advantage of the momentum built during this IYAFa year to continue rolling out and scaling up SSF Guidelines implementation, moving toward the 10th anniversary of their endorsement in 2024. During these next two years, we call upon states to fully recognize the SSF Guidelines by making them binding at the national level. We also call upon states to implement the SSF guidelines, through the allocation of financial and technical resources, building institutional capacity, and developing participatory implementation mechanisms, in close collaboration with small-scale fishers, Indigenous Peoples and our organizations around the world.