

Excellency,

Dr. Somying Plumsombun, Director General, Department of Fisheries

Excellency

Dr. Jaranthada Karnasuta, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives

Excellency

Dr. Plodprasop Suraswadi, Advisor to the Prime Minister

Distinguished conference participants, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of Mr Jacques Diouf, Director-General of FAO, it is a great honour and pleasure for me to welcome you to this global conference on securing sustainable small-scale fisheries. My colleague Ichiro Nomura, Assistant-Director General of the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department had planned to participate in this important event but was held back in Rome for urgent matters in relation to FAO's current reform process. He asked me to convey to you his sincere regrets not to be with you and his best wishes for a successful conference. He also asked me to inform you that outcomes of this conference will be presented to the forthcoming session of FAO's Committee on Fisheries in March 2009.

In recent years, the issue of small-scale fisheries as an important contributor to food security and poverty alleviation has been receiving growing attention. The importance and complexity of the small-scale fisheries sector in this context are increasingly recognized.

FAO attributes high priority to the small-scale fisheries sector whose potential and constraints to contributing to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals have been on the agenda of recent sessions of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI). It is gratifying to note the importance that FAO's Member States continue to award the sector. In its most recent 2007 session, the Committee gave its support to a strategy of action for bringing together responsible fisheries and social development. It also asked the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department to examine the convening of an international conference on these issues in 2008.

We have been able to convene this conference with the generous support of the Department of Fisheries of the Royal Government of Thailand and our partner agencies SEAFDEC and WorldFish Center, as well as several conference sponsors including the Government of Norway, German Technical Cooperation Agency (GTZ), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF), The World Conservation Union (IUCN), and the World Bank's PROFISH Program. One other important sponsor will be announced tomorrow.

While I do not wish to take much of your limited conference time I need to highlight some of the indispensable roles that small-scale fisheries sector play in general and perhaps more so in Asia which is home to the vast majority of small-scale fisheries in the world.

A first primary and priority role is food security: Fish contributes up to 50 percent of animal protein intakes in this region while globally it is some 16 percent. And fish is a highly nutritious food. Small-scale fisheries are the primary suppliers of domestic markets.

Another priority role is poverty prevention and reduction: The small-scale sector employs more than 25 million fulltime and parttime fishers in developing countries. Another 70 million people are employed in post-harvest activities. In total, the small-scale sector provides over 90 percent of all fisheries jobs and provides livelihoods to several hundred million people, many of them poor if not amongst the poorest in their region or country.

Perhaps even more significant is the fact that about half of the total fisheries workforce in developing countries are women whose income and care is often the most critical part in a households well-being.

In addition there are millions of occasional and subsistence fishers who are not well reflected

in official statistics but whose livelihoods contributions are critical to poor rural and indigenous communities.

There is one more aspect I wish to highlight that has become so sadly and devastatingly evident in several of the countries of this region. The 2004 tsunami has tragically shown the great vulnerability of small-scale fisheries. This natural disasters has led to large losses of lives, houses, livelihood assets and infrastructure and much suffering and sadness. On a positive note, it has also shown the sector's resilience and capacity for restoration.

Small-scale fisheries do not only have to cope with the unpredictable nature of the climate and nature itself. The recent economic crisis which has come immediately after the unprecedented fuel price rises and food price rises is another example of how economies and geopolitics can catch us by surprise. The fact that these impacts resonate worldwide, shows how truly global the economy has become and that small scale fisheries themselves are not isolated from these effects. Again resilience is the key and we look forward to your positive inputs in this conference as to how we can work proactively towards improvement of the small-scale fisheries sector and those whose livelihoods depend upon it.

There are other factors of vulnerability that are caused by the chronic social and economic and political marginalization of small-scale fisheries. How to address them is at the core of this conference. Issues of economic, social and human rights need to be addressed if we endeavour to achieving sustainable development of small-scale fisheries - sustainable fisheries that respect the limits of our natural resources and the obligation we have towards our children and grand children of protecting our environment.

I sincerely wish you a successful conference and a pleasant stay in Bangkok and other places of Thailand should you visit them.

Thank you for your attention.