

Declaration – WFFP 8th General Assembly
20 November 2024
Brasilia, Brazil

We, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) have gathered from around the world from 15 to 21 November 2024 in Brasilia, Brazil for the WFFP's 8th General Assembly. Even if the spread of COVID pandemic caused delay in our most important decision-making space, we are continuing to fight in support of small-scale fishers. We invite the world to listen our voices to advance in the safeguard of our collective rights, through the implementation of real solutions for our Peoples.

We, as representatives of 29 national and regional organizations of fishers counting on over than 10 million fisher people from all over the world, reiterate the message that small-scale fisheries are the key actors to ensure food sovereignty, biodiversity, and environmental sustainability. However, our survival and prosperity depend on systemic changes in the global food system, in reversion of the dominant capitalist model of economic expansion, and on governments recognizing our collective rights.

We are living in a world in which conflicts and wars are the root causes of the advance of hunger and poverty, affecting especially women, youth and marginalized communities. Therefore, we strongly condemn the use of starvation as weapon of war. We stand in solidarity with the fishers and peoples of Palestine, but also with fishers and peoples suffering from other conflicts such as Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Myanmar and the Sahel countries, among others. The full respect of international law must be the basis to continue working in the international community.

Other than conflicts, our fishers and Indigenous Peoples continue in suffering violation of our rights, especially in the access to fishing due to the promotion of false solutions, the advancement of industrial aquaculture, and the unregulated conflict between industrial and small-scale fisheries.

False solutions are being promoted at international level – promoted mainly by the Environmental NGOs – and affecting strongly our territories and our lives. The target of conserving 30% of the oceans (and land) by 2030 - known as 30x30 - is a threat to traditional fishers, where these measures threaten our lives, collecting evidence of fishers shots by rangers. We reject the climate solutions such as Blue Carbon, carbon credits and biodiversity offsets. And we resist the so-called sustainable massive Wind Farms that are being constructed everywhere in the world.

Industrial aquaculture or “fish factories,” sometimes described as “aquatic foods” or “blue foods” are presented as a sustainable alternative to capture fisheries, but this is false. The expansion of industrial aquaculture is leading to increased violence against communities, especially fisherwomen, who are excluded from their traditional territories and harvesting grounds; subjected to violence, harassment, criminalisation, and abuse; and deprived of their livelihoods and their food sovereignty

Industrial fishing is closely related to industrial aquaculture, as increasing amounts of fish caught by trawlers are processed into feed for aquaculture. This increases pressure on wild capture fisheries and undermines food sovereignty of small-scale fisheries. Industrial fishing is worsening the global food crisis and is increasing the process of biodiversity loss.

We are witnessing collective struggles from across the world, by communities who are being dispossessed. The struggles and socio-cultural stigmas associated with fishing have driven many young people to seek opportunities outside the sector, often leading to migration to urban areas or to other countries, threatening our heritage, culture and their long-term viability. We aim at increasing the participation of youth within our organization to allow youth in defending their rights at national, regional and global level.

Women are leading battles to resist efforts to wipe out our histories and homogenise our identity and culture. It is fundamental to consider women as guardians of agroecology and biodiversity. Their perspectives and rights should be fulfilled in public policies, programmes and legal frameworks. Women fishers are already advocating for their rights in their communities, and in fisheries sectors globally, and they should be supported to do so.

The WFFP recognizes that Indigenous Peoples suffer the most under capitalism and imperialism. Governments have separated the land from the sea through policy reforms and development projects, yet Indigenous Peoples have coexisted with nature and protection our ecosystems since time immemorial. Land and the sea are intricately connected. Over half of the world's rivers now face declining water levels due to climate change, pollution, dam construction, interlinking of rivers, aquaculture, and unchecked industrial activities. Inland fisheries must be explicitly acknowledged in national and international frameworks, ensuring their inclusion in policies.

We respond to these threats, building solidarity with other global social movements through the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC). We remain committed in participate in political legitimate multilateral policy platform related to food and agriculture where we can advocate for our rights and interests. We consider the FAO and the CFS to be the UN agencies that supports the creation and the implementation of global governance with our active participation. In particular, we support the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines, as the basis to guide all items being discussed in the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI), while at the same time they are guiding the creation of public policies for small-scale fisheries through the UN Decade on Family Farming. We also consider the Human Rights Council to be the place where we will be able to document the violation of our collective rights as fishers and raise our voices with specific mechanisms.

We are not sitting waiting for the catastrophe. We are fighting back, and we will continue to do so. That is why we are mobilizing within and beyond the food sovereignty movement, to build our response at both global and local levels through the Nyéléni Process. Through this multi-year process, we expect to bring together thousands of grassroots organizations and other allies to discuss and put forward a strong food sovereignty and climate, social, racial and gender justice agenda for the years to come.

Everywhere costs of production are rising, food prices decrease, and we have more and more difficulties to access to our seas. We need public policies now to continue to do what we love to do. We cannot wait more. Otherwise, we will all become a museum. We were born in the sea, and we want to die in the sea. But to do so, we need concrete measures, and we need to act now.

“We are the oceans, we are the waters, we are the people!”