

# Yemaya

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ICSF's NEWSLETTER ON GENDER AND FISHERIES

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## From the Editor

Dear Friends,

This issue of *Yemaya*, as always, carries articles, news and other developments from different continents—from Latin America, North America, Europe and Asia.

It also focuses on the recently held 92<sup>nd</sup> session of the International Labour Conference (ILC). The fifth item on the agenda of this Conference was on “Work in the fishing sector: A discussion with a view to the Adoption of a Comprehensive Standard (a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation)”. Several gender-related issues were raised during discussions on this agenda item, and have been excerpted for this issue of *Yemaya*. Significantly, as is clear from the report of the discussions, the proposed Convention aims to extend coverage of labour standards to all—men and women—involved in the fishing sector, including those on artisanal and small-scale vessels and those working to process fish on board.

There is, however, also a need to consider whether coverage of core labour standards and social security can be extended to those who work on shore in the fisheries sector, in pre-harvest and post-harvest activities, mainly in the informal sector. By all accounts, many of these workers, particularly in developing countries, are women, and their numbers run into millions.

Clearly this is an issue of vital importance. The report of the ILO Director General on the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, to the 92<sup>nd</sup> Session of

the ILC titled “A Fair Globalization: The Role of the ILO”, emphasizes in many places the need to extend social security to the excluded, to extend rights and protection to the informal economy and to promote gender equality. It draws attention to the emphasis in the Commission’s report on dealing with the informal economy by providing an adequate framework for property and social rights, and by supporting associational approaches, cooperatives and other measures to overcome informality. It is to be hoped that the work of the ILO on labour standards in the fishing sector can be extended in the near future to the fisheries sector, to cover as well the millions of shore-based workers in the informal sector, not presently covered under any form of labour standards.

We would also like to take this opportunity to inform you that ICSF is launching a web page on women in fisheries. The web page will bring together, in one place, information resources on women in fisheries. Do visit the page and send us any comments you may have. It can be accessed from [www.icsf.net](http://www.icsf.net).

On a related issue, the collection of articles on women in fisheries—Gender Agenda—recently brought out by ICSF, is now available online in French, with the title “Pour améliorer la situation des femmes dans la pêche”. And, for Portuguese speakers, the news is that *Yemaya* is now available in Portuguese.

As always, we look forward to articles, news and views from you. Please send these in by 15 October for inclusion in the next issue of *Yemaya*.



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**ILO/Labour****Gender Focus**

*This piece excerpts the references to women/gender in discussions in the Committee on the Fisheries Sector on the agenda item on labour standards in the fishing sector at the recently held International Labour Conference. It has been compiled by the ICSF Secretariat.*

The fifth item on the agenda of the 92<sup>nd</sup> session of the International Labour Conference (ILC), held in June 2004, was on “Work in the fishing sector: A discussion with a view to the Adoption of a Comprehensive Standard (a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation)”.

The new standard was discussed with a view to revising the seven existing ILO instruments applicable to the fishing sector—five Conventions and two Recommendations. It is worth noting that these ILO fishing labour standards were adopted a long time ago, in 1920, 1959 and 1966, and are not, therefore, reflective of the changes that have since taken place in fishing operations. Moreover, the level of ratifications of these instruments has been low.

The Conclusions adopted by the Committee on the Fisheries Sector at the ILC aim to reach, for the first time, the majority of the world’s fishers, including those on board small fishing vessels, including on rivers and inland waters. They also aim to provide protection to the self-employed, including to those who are paid in a share of the catch. They are to apply to all fishers and fishing vessels engaged in commercial fishing operations, defined as all fishing operations, including fishing operations on rivers and inland waters, with the exception of subsistence fishing and recreational fishing.

Certain categories of fishers and fishing vessels may be exempted from the requirements of the Convention, where the application is considered to be impracticable. However, such exclusions could occur only after consultation with the representative organizations of fishing vessel owners and fishers. The proposed standards also aim to include issues related to occupational safety and health, and social security—issues that have not so far been addressed.

During discussions in the Committee on the Fisheries Sector several delegates raised issues related to women and to small-scale fishing. Some of these discussions, as contained in the Provisional Record of the session, are summarized below.

During the Introduction, the Chairperson “recalled that the purpose of this first consideration of a new comprehensive standard was to strengthen decent work in the fishing sector, to promote opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and humanity.” He also pointed to the challenging task ahead: “to prepare a standard that did justice to the great diversity of the sector, the many types and sizes of vessels, the variety of fishing operations, and the different levels of development in the States concerned.”

During the General Discussion, several members referred to the importance of bringing small-scale family-run fishing operations, accounting for most workers in the sector, under the coverage of the standards. The Government Member from Canada pointed to the necessity of developing international labour standards specific to the fishing sector with particular focus on occupational safety and health, and emphasized that the text should provide strong protection for fishers and be flexible enough to accommodate diverse operations, conditions and employment relationships.

**Part I. Definitions and scope***Definitions, Clause 5 (c)*

With reference to the definition of “fisher”, the Government member of Brazil, speaking also on behalf of the Government member of Chile, introduced an amendment to add, at the beginning of clause (c), the following phrase: “without prejudice to the provisions of national legislation, for the purposes of this Convention.” This amendment addressed a possible exclusion from protection of fishers, who were not working aboard ships. According to Brazilian legislation, workers working in aqua farming, as well as persons catching crabs in swamps or picking oysters were also considered fishers. These were currently not covered by the Office text, since presence aboard a fishing vessel was a strict requirement. The Government member of Brazil stressed that the amendment’s goal was not to provide an automatic extension of cover, but to allow member States to fill gaps resulting from too strict a definition of fishers,

thus giving discretion to member States to extend the cover of the Convention to other groups of workers they considered fishers” (para 149).

The Government member of Norway understood the concerns of the Government members of Brazil and Chile, but pointed out that Norwegian legislation did not treat workers involved in fish harvesting as fishers. They were covered by regulations for shore-based workers. Since the amendment created two alternative definitions of fisher, Norway did not support it. Member States could, in any case, extend the protection to other types of workers, if they so wished (para 150). The Norwegian position was supported by several other Government members, including Greece and Germany. The Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons expressed sympathy with the reasons for the proposed amendment, but said they could not support it.

The representative of the Secretary-General pointed out that article 19, paragraph 8, of the ILO Constitution, allows governments to apply more favourable conditions than those provided for in a Convention or Recommendation. On that basis, the Government member of Brazil withdrew the amendment.

Following this, the Government member of Argentina submitted an amendment, seconded by the government member of Brazil, to insert the words “man or woman” after the word “person” in clause (c) on definition of “fisher”. This was done because the concept of gender did not appear anywhere, and they felt it important for issues such as accommodation, to consider that the vessel could be carrying women as well as men (para 161).



The Government member of Brazil added that, besides the question of arrangements on board, very real problems, such as sexual harassment on board fishing vessels, needed to be addressed (para 162).

However, this amendment was opposed by several Government members and by the Employer and Worker Vice-Chairpersons, given that after lengthy discussions it had been agreed that the term “fisher” was a term that would cover both men and women. The Government member of Germany also opposed the amendment, noting that specific issues related to the situation of women could be taken into account elsewhere in the text. The amendment was withdrawn.

### **Part III. Minimum requirements for work on board fishing vessels**

#### *Part III.2. Medical Examination*

The Government members of Argentina, Brazil and Chile submitted an amendment to Point 20, clause (a), to add after the word “examinations” the words, “also considering gender issues”. The Government member of Chile explained that provisions on medical examinations should take into account gender issues (para 424).

However, the Employer Vice-Chairperson rejected the amendment given that the Committee had earlier agreed that “fisher” comprised men and women. The Government member of France considered the amendment unjustified and pointed out that it was up to the doctor to check the aptitude for work of both men and women. It was further pointed out that such an amendment would set a precedent for every ILO Convention concerning aptitude for work. The Government member of Chile subsequently withdrew the amendment.

### **Part IV. Conditions of service**

#### *IV.1 Manning and hours of rest*

The worker members submitted an amendment to replace the title “Manning” with “Crewing/manning” (para 459). It was explained that this was to provide a more gender-neutral terminology. The proposal was to use “crewing/manning”, a more inclusive term, in the title while keeping “manning” in the substantive provisions, because of its legal significance. This was opposed by the Employer Vice-Chairperson, who considered that “manning” meant “resourcing the

vessel”. It was also pointed out that the Committee had already decided not to use the term “crew member” for fisher. Following opposition from other Government members the amendment was withdrawn.

## **Part VI. Health protection, medical care and social security**

### *VI.1 Medical Care*

The Worker member from the United Kingdom introduced an amendment to replace in clause (a) the word “appropriate” by “specified”; add “, including women’s sanitary protection and discreet and environmentally friendly disposal units,” after the word “supplies”; and to add “and applicable international standards” after the word “voyage”, to be proactive in protecting the health of women fishers (para 610).

The Employer Vice-Chairperson further proposed a subamendment to add the words “and gender” to the original text of the paragraph, as follows: “taking into account the number and gender of fishers on board”.

However, the Employer’s proposal was opposed by the Government member of Germany as it narrowed the scope of the text too much. It was stated that this was not an occasional medical problem, but a regular day-to-day issue of personal hygiene. She therefore fully supported the Workers’ amendment. The amendment was also supported by the Government members of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, France, Guatemala, Mexico, Spain and Venezuela.

The Government member of Greece considered the second part of the amendment too detailed and subamended it to have it placed in the Recommendation, the position to be recommended by the Drafting Committee. It was a health not a medical issue. The Government member of the United Kingdom seconded this. The amendment was finally adopted as subamended by the Government member of Greece.

Part D (Proposed Conclusions with a view to a Recommendation, Part III. Health protection, medical care and social security), para 60 thus states that “The competent authority should establish the list of medical supplies, including women’s sanitary protection and discreet environmentally friendly disposal units, and equipment to be carried on fishing vessels appropriate to the risks concerned.”

## **South America/ Chile**

### **My life is the sea**

*This brief profile of a fisherwoman from Chile is taken from the book ‘Mujeres de la Pesca Artesanal, relatos e imágenes de mujeres de la V región’ (Women and artisanal fishing: stories and pictures of women from Region V).*

**by Francesca Mariana, an anthropologist who works with CEDIPAC, an NGO associated with CONAPACH, the national fishworker organization in Chile.**

There are five children in my family, four girls and one boy. My father wanted two boys to go fishing with, but the second one never came. So of the four girls, he selected one to be trained to fish—and that was me. And I’m certainly not complaining about that.

I’ve been going to sea since I was six, but actively since the age of 12. When I was a child, the three of us—my brother, my father and I—would always work together. When my mother found out that I had chosen this profession, she cried, saying that having three family members to worry about was a lot.

I am 38 years old and have a son of 14. He is doing his first year at secondary school (*primero medio*). I don’t want him to become a fisherman, not because I don’t respect the work a fisherman does, but because there are many sacrifices to make, and there are good times and bad times. I am not married, I never got married. The father of my son lives in Loncura. He is an occasional fisherman. I don’t live with him.

When my son was six months old, a tiny tot, I took him out in the boat. I secured him to the bow with a small chord. Once, when he was bigger and starting to stand up, he nearly went overboard because I had not secured him to anything. I managed to grab him, but he was soaked all over. I told my parents about this much later.

Soon after my son was born, my father went on a trip to the south. I could not go because I had recently had my son. I remember crying because I wanted to go. I told my mother that she could look after the baby for me whilst we were away, but my mother told me, “No, because you are breastfeeding, you can’t go”. So I went for two or three months without going to sea. Later I used to leave the milk under the pillow in a bottle wrapped in a cloth, and my mother would feed my son whenever he demanded milk.

I'm also a sandwich maker in the *Fuente de Soda* (soda fountain) that belongs to my aunt, where I work every day in the summer, starting five years ago. I get up almost every day between two and three, change my clothes, wait for my brother to get up and together we go fishing. After returning from the sea, we sell our fish and when I get home, I sleep for a while, from 11 am till 4 in the afternoon, and return to the *Fuente de Soda*. In summer, when I have both jobs, I have the most work.

There are some fishermen who think that a woman in a boat brings bad luck. But I am personally known in the fishing villages of Cartagena, La Salina de Puhaiy, Papudo and Los Molles, having worked with my father for many years. We would camp for three months in Las Salinas de Puhaiy and for five months in Cartagena.

Apart from collecting razor clams and fishing, I also dive, though I don't have a licence. I have not been diving much recently after having nearly punctured my ears. I also suffer from painful menstrual periods, and have to take to bed often. I don't dive around here any more, but it's fantastic under the water and when I go diving, time flies and you'll have to come and search for me...

When the water is turbid, you don't see very much, but when it is clear, it's beautiful. Everything that is on land you find under the water; there are little bushes, coloured green, blue and purple, which disappear when you go to pick them. I used to play around a lot with these plants when I first started to dive, which was when I was 15 years old. My father taught me to dive in Las Salinas de Puhaiy. I used to dive wearing only



shorts and a t-shirt, with a plastic cap on my head because when the water is freezing, it really hurts your head. Once I took up the challenge of a local fisherman, who said, "I bet you won't go diving in mid-winter." He was wearing a diving suit and I only had my usual clothes. I plunged in, but he didn't.

Until a few years ago, I was the only woman fisher with a licence, but it cost me dearly to get it. The local harbour master at the time provided a letter requesting that I be given an artisanal fishing licence so that I could go out to work without any problems. The first application was rejected, since it came from a woman. Following that, the harbour master and I went to talk personally to the navy captain. He told me that it was not possible to grant a licence. When I asked why, he said, "Because you are a woman". That made me really angry. "So being a woman is an impediment to working?", I asked furiously and told him off for discriminating against women. He finally gave me a licence. But later we failed to get it renewed.

My mother always told me, "Fish only until you are 40 or 45, at the latest, no more, because afterwards you will have problems with your bones, due to the cold." But the truth is that I hardly know how to do anything else. I have a licence to handle foodstuff, to get which I had to do a course. It was my aunt who asked me to do it so as to have an alternative source of livelihood, for when it is no longer possible to work at sea. But the truth is that my life is the sea.

I also like to experience new fisheries and new challenges. I have even been after albacore, out in the deep sea. I respect the sea, but I am terrified of fog. Once a ship nearly hit us, right here, inside the bay. Another time, the fog made us nearly capsized on the rocks. That's why I am really scared of the fog.

I'm also scared of the wind, but not so much, because inshore, the sea is different. You know that if you capsized, you can swim for a while to reach shore. But you know that if you capsized offshore, you will go on swimming until you get hypothermia. There are many fishermen, workmates, who have died at sea, leaving behind just an urn, clothes and a photo for their families to remember. I wouldn't want that to happen to my son.

Once, in Quintero, a fisherman went missing for three years. His boat capsized and some fishermen in a boat found his body three years later. They recognized him because his identification documents were intact in a

nylon purse. There was a second funeral and the family had to experience grief all over again. In such cases, until the body is actually found, there is always hope that the person is alive somewhere, that he could have gone north or south, that he could have been picked up by a boat... A thousand possibilities are offered, but rarely do people immediately believe that the lost person is at the bottom of the sea.

We believe that the sea is female, so when things are going well for us we say to it: "OK, Maria, don't give us too much fish because later you'll make us pay for it, and you'll probably abandon us out here, so that's enough..."

This excerpt is from the book *Mujeres de la Pesca Artesanal, relatos e imágenes de mujeres de la V región* that was published in Chile in 2001 thanks to support from the Art and Culture Development Fund of the Ministry of Education.

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## Asia/ Indonesia

### Getting together

*A profile of Kopus, a new organization for shrimp peelers of Sei Bilah village, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra Province*

**By Noor Aida, Co-ordinator of the Women's Division of JALA, North Sumatra**

It takes two to three hours by road to reach Sei Bilah village located in Pangkalan Brandan municipality, Regency of Langkat, North Sumatra Province. Most people in this village are Malays, who live in poor conditions. The fishers in the village cannot increase their catches due to competition from local trawlers as well as trawlers from Thailand. Besides this, destructive fishing practices and poaching affect their livelihoods too, driving many fishers into unemployment. So dependent are they on the sea that they cannot work other jobs.

Most of the women of the village are engaged in domestic household work. When their husbands return from the sea with shells, shrimp and crab, they help process the products. Shrimp peeling is the main activity of the women in Sei Bilah. Shelling crab is the second activity of choice. Two kinds of shrimp are caught

here—white shrimp and *kurik* shrimp. These fetch different prices in the market. The *kurik* shrimp, which is larger, is more expensive. Two kilos of raw shrimp yield one kg of peeled shrimp. The women source the shrimp individually from fishermen or from a *taukay* (shrimp collector), to whom they also sell the shelled shrimp. Women also shell the shrimp for the *taukay* for wages. Their incomes vary with the shrimp catches, which, in turn, are affected by the operations of trawlers in inshore areas.

In order to tackle some of their problems, the women shrimp peelers of Sei Bilah got together to form a group called 'Kopus', with Zainab as their leader. Though the group is very new, the women hope it will inspire other women fishworkers in the village to join up or form similar groups. Now there are 30 members in the group, which is trying to raise money through loans to buy shrimp and build a place for storage and processing.

As a new organization, Kopus is seeking the support of other organizations. JALA, the advocacy network for North Sumatra fisherfolk, has pledged to support the group by sharing information, introducing it to a larger network of organizations and involving it in any discussions and meetings. Among the most important imperatives now is to raise the awareness of women on the need to organize themselves into associations and groups. Only through organization, sharing and solidarity can the bargaining position of women fishers be strengthened, especially in a rural setting, where women have been traditionally subordinate to the men. With experience, Kopus can expect to mature into a strong and purposeful organization.

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## European Union/ Netherlands

### True partnership

*A story about the struggle of a wife and husband against the threats facing inland fishermen in the Netherlands*

**By Marja Bekendam, wife of an inland fisherman and a member of *Vin Vis*, the women in fisheries network of the Netherlands.**

Fifteen years ago my husband took over the fishing enterprise of his grandfather, which until then had been managed by his uncles, the brothers of his mother. His grandfather used to fish with a sailing boat in the largest

bay of the Netherlands, which is also the delta of two rivers. In 1932, a dike was built to close the bay, and the water slowly changed into freshwater from its erstwhile salted state, and thereby became a lake. That change also had an impact on the species of fish caught in those days.

Between 1940 and 1965, land was reclaimed from the lake and two polders made. This also decreased the area available for fishing, which, again, had an impact on the fishery. Besides, pollution from the rivers affected the fish and caused eel to get tumours, reducing their appeal for human consumption. As a result, the fishery no longer provided enough income, and my husband's uncles decided to work in a local factory for two days a week.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the rivers became cleaner and the fish stocks recovered. The eel became healthy again. Also, uncommon species of fish began to be seen more and more. So when my husband took over the enterprise in 1989, he was able to earn a good living from fishing again. He caught eel in fykes from April up to November, bream with trawl nets from December to March, and, in the early spring, he sometimes caught smelt.

After some years, my husband could afford to modernize his fishing enterprise. He bought new fykes and even a secondhand boat. The modernization helped him reduce fishing time and invest in another business outside fisheries. The past experiences of his grandfather and uncles had taught him that inland fishing was very vulnerable to the impact of various unpredictables.

It turned out that he had made a wise decision. In the mid-1990s, the government decided that it was necessary to remove the polluted sediment from the bottom of the lake. Even though it was known that a clean layer of mud covered the polluted sediment, it was feared that the underlying polluted sediment might affect the groundwater and thus perhaps also the drinking water. Plans were made to clean the bottom of the lake by dredging. A huge storage depot was built in the middle of the lake into which the polluted mud was dumped to make an artificial island. Besides that, many more little islands were made at the delta of the river for birds to breed. The area for fishing got reduced again and, in a way, history repeated itself. Grandpa had lost many acres of fishing ground when the polders were made, and we too had to give up

fishing ground for all the artificial islands. A lot of meetings with the fishermen were held those days. The government promised us compensation and, in the beginning, we believed them.

At first, I was not very interested in the problems my husband was facing as a fisherman because I felt that it was his business. My husband left home every day at the same time and always returned in the evening, although I could never be certain at what time. I was kept busy at home looking after three young children and so I could not help my husband with the accounts and other administrative work. I only helped him write letters—but he had to tell me what to write. My husband always gave me reports of the meetings he attended. After a hard day's work, we would sit around the table until late into the night, discussing the conflict between the inland fishermen and the government. The more I heard, the more I learned, and the more I became involved.

To get compensation from government, we had to deal with professional experts and legal advisers. But we were just simple folk and though my husband worked hard, he wasn't a professional expert either and so we had to get help from one of the fishermen's organizations. We hired a lawyer who knew everything about procedures and laws, but nothing about fishing. So we had to tell him what to do. My husband and I had a hard time those days. But it also felt good to fight together. We found out that we were complementary to each other. He taught me a lot about fisheries and my office experience helped me write letters and do the budgeting and accounting.



We finally did receive a small compensation from the government, but far less than we expected. Our struggle is not over yet, but we survived so far. We were able to survive and continue because of the alternative business my husband started in the good days. And although my husband no longer fishes every day of the week, nor every week of the month, nor every month of the year, he is still a fisherman and I am still a fisherman's wife.

Because of my involvement in the struggle of the inland fishermen, someone drew my attention to *VinVis*, the women in fisheries network of the Netherlands. After visiting one of their meetings, I decided to join the network. So far I am the only inland fisherman's wife in *VinVis*. But it surprises me how much I have in common with the other women who are wives of seagoing fishermen. We have to deal with the same kind of problems, and it feels good to share experiences and knowledge. It is unfortunate that there are practically no women participating in the existing fishermen's organizations. But I hope one day our network will no longer be needed. That will be the day that women are fully accepted as true partners in fisheries.

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## Europe/ France

### A winner of battles and hearts

*A portrait of Jeannette, a fishworker whose life is characterized by buoyancy*

by Roger Cougot, a retired Ouest-France Daily journalist

Lorient, Brittany. No medal, no official address, but warm feelings aplenty and a flurry of friendly greetings. In early 2004, in a corner of the Keroman fishing harbour, where the mist of economic doldrums lingers on, a party is going on to honour a fishworker, one of those women who in the mid-1970s (so long ago!) toiled to raise the local fish trade to uncommon heights.

In those days, fish landings reached 70,000 tonnes a year, three times more than the present figure. At the auctions, there was fish galore to rejoice the traders, loads of *Breiz pesked* (Breton fish) that kept very busy the women who sorted and processed the seafood in

the merchants' shops. Jeannette was one such woman.

She is now an 80-year old girlish-looking lady. Most of her lifetime was taken over by the fish trade, and solidly anchored in the cold environment of Keroman, where conditions of work are still reminiscent of 19th century sweatshops. Hands and feet were forever cold, and there was due coldness as well in the trading arrangements, where business was business. Into this atmosphere, Jeannette tried to bring in a measure of warm-heartedness. Quietly and relentlessly, she battled for human dignity and social justice, for added humaneness in that bloody occupation where "the fish always commands".

And that is why her friends threw a party to honour the lady, the fishworker who was never awarded any medal but got covered with fish scales instead. Yet Jeannette maintains her buoyancy.

She was born on 10 January 1924 at Pontivy, in the hinterland, 50 km from the coast. And there was little motivation for her to head for the seashore, except that her grandfather used to board a ship at Roscoff in northern Brittany and cross over to England to sell onions, a 'Johnny' as such people were nicknamed by the British. In 1948, Jeanne Le Tinier, the young lady, born *dans les terres* (in the hinterland) into a family of well-to-do ironmongers, headed for the busy town of Lorient, where the population was coping with the aftermath of the war bombings, and many were living in spartan wooden cabins.

Just like the river Blavet that flows through her hometown, Jeannette did not take a straight course to the sea. But right from the start, she was bent on working with the lowly (*le milieu populaire*) and engaging in social activism. For a while, she worked with a mothers' help organization, but was soon miffed with the paternalistic approach of its higher-class leaders who hired labour for the sake of charity instead of abiding by the principles of social justice. Jeannette then got a job in a cannery that processed beans, peas and fish. That was before the 'delocalization' spree, when, on the Breton coast, processing plants still needed seasonal workers.

In 1955, Jeannette moved further towards the seashore and the quays of Keroman, where she remained as an *employée de marée* (woman fishworker) until her retirement in 1980, and long afterwards to help those still at work. Throughout her lifetime at the harbour, she stubbornly tried to bring about some improvement





in that environment. She joined the union and took part in all its initiatives, however humble and low-key or tense and highly conflicting. But all protest was finally squashed, because at the Keroman harbour the “fish rules”, which calls for ten-hour working days at minimum wages!

Later, in 1977, Jeannette joined the sorters and dockers in a protracted battle at the SOPROMER processing plant, which was a precursor of the imminent crisis in the industrial fisheries in Lorient. Though technical inputs (partly financed by the producers, including individual fishermen who paid professional fees) were adequate, the private interests of fish merchants and the appetite for short-term profits prevailed over the need to protect jobs.

Jeannette would extend her care to the women working in the newly established department stores, attempting to develop a true working class culture at the local centre, trying to create a workers’ culture among fishworkers, metal workers and employees of all kinds. She extended small gestures at her place of work too: Jeannette must have been the only woman who allowed herself a *pause casse-croûte* (tea break), which at that time was meant exclusively for men.

Jeannette believed—and still does—that something can be done to improve the lot of every woman, of every person, in spite of all the odds, despite the dirty tricks from bosses and colleagues who, unfortunately, would not mind treading on your feet to suck up to the *petits chefs* (supervisors) for uncertain gains.

In the end, the battles of Jeannette and other women did bear some fruit. After years of waiting, a collective labour agreement has come to life, but, not surprisingly, its implementation remains rather uncertain. Most importantly, there is something less visible, albeit very real: that flicker of hope, that tiny thread of gold, as Jeannette would say, namely, the virtue of human solidarity. For the sake of human dignity, even in times of real hardship and conflict, Jeannette remained buoyant and smiling. Her friends who gathered at that birthday party in a corner of the Keroman fishing harbour would have had no trouble picking the message of a lifetime: *gardez la pêche*, in other words, “conserve your buoyancy”.

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## Europe

### Weaving networks

*Women of fishing communities in Europe are trying to strengthen their networks*

**This piece by Solène Le Roux is from *Le Marin*, 20 February 2004**

“Women play a double role in fishing—directly, in the processing sector, and indirectly, as wives. But this latter role is not recognized, and hence remains invisible”. Europe-wide, this statement made about Spain by Maria-José Gonzalez Martinez, General Secretary of FEABP (the Spanish Federation of Fishing Boat Owners), is something all fishing women’s associations share. A study has shown that views are similar in the 15 member States of the European Union (EU), where 84,000 women work in the fishing industry, representing 22 per cent of the workforce. Hence the desire of the associations to defend themselves at the European level, as expressed by their representatives at the meeting organized by AGLIA (Association of French Coastal Atlantic Regions) on 4 and 5 February 2004.

“The status of women has evolved with the 1997 Fisheries Law. They have increased their representation in the local fisheries committees, in the co-operatives and in management centres”, said Anne-

Marie Esteban, Vice President of the Federation of Women in the Maritime Sector, a national organization derived from the fusion of Fifel and 3FM. “But still we often face rejection by the sector, or paternalism, which is another way of shutting us up. The maritime world can’t evolve without the active participation of women.”

Maria-José Gonzalez Martinez from Spain made a similar statement: “Increasingly, women can be found heading fishing enterprises. Qualification and pay levels have improved. Through social contributions, women have earned the right to retirement pensions and sick leave. But as regards equality in the workplace, salaries remain 12 per cent lower than those of men and there is still a significant lack of recognition of their participation in enterprises.”

“Women have an irreplaceable role that must be made visible,” acknowledges René-Pierre Chever, Secretary of the Guilvinec Local Fisheries Committee. “In times of crisis, they organize or support campaigns. They (also) have a long-term perspective on the resource”. “In Spain the women have fought with the boat owners to improve fishermen’s working conditions,” adds Maria-José Gonzalez.

In order to allow women to take up work requiring higher qualifications, or to carry out their current responsibilities in a better way, wives who collaborate in artisanal maritime businesses can avail of training organized in Sables-d’Olonne. In two years, it is possible to acquire the equivalent of Level 4 in administration, management and business practice. According to Florence Pinaud, President of the Vendee Sailors’ Wives Association, this training was proving to be “very positive”. With Ministry support, it could become recognized and widespread.

Training is also a priority for UMAR (*Uniao das Mulheres de Alternativa Reposta*) in the Azores because, as highlighted by the Director, Clarisse Canha, “women taken on in fishing are not paid”. Women provide administrative assistance, they prepare the equipment (longlines, nets, etc.), but they are invisible in the profession or they have seasonally paid work in the canning factory, which is precarious. UMAR is proposing training to improve the employment prospects of women, and to valorize their knowledge and experience.

There are regular exchanges of experiences between women’s associations. When 200 of them met in Brussels at the end of January 2003, they proposed the construction of a truly Europe-wide network. “Like the one in Latin America that groups 533 women from 23 organizations”, suggested Maria-José Gonzalez. “We could then make proposals to the European Commission.”

The website project ‘Women in the Net’ proposed by the Italian organization, Lega Pesca, and financed by the EU could benefit this network. “As language is the main constraint, this site will be available in French, English, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese,” indicated Francesca Ottolenghi, who works for the project. An online forum, monthly chats and audio-conferences would allow an exchange of ideas on women’s contribution to fisheries, strategies for professional valorization and enhancement of qualifications. If the EU accepts this project, it could be established within five months.

As the organization grows, “fishing women must ensure that their associations do not get manipulated,” warns René-Pierre Chever. Already some people are trying to get them to take up positions to block community decisions.

## North America/ United States

### Oppose this project

*This press release from the Gloucester Fishermen’s Wives Association (GFWA) details the reasons for its opposition to the proposed unloading facility for liquefied natural gas (LNG) in offshore waters*

In the past month, both the Gloucester Daily Times and the Boston Globe have informed the public that Excelerate Energy, Limited Partnership, a one-year-old energy company, is proposing to build an unloading facility for liquefied natural gas (LNG) in offshore waters. The facility they are proposing will be the first of its kind in the world. The company asserts that this facility will have a minimal effect on the underwater ecosystem fishermen depend on and will present no danger to the public-at-large. As President of the Gloucester Fishermen’s Wives Association, my question is, “How do they know?”



Especially, given that they have very little experience and no track record with this kind of facility.

There are reasons why the public needs to oppose the building of such a facility so close to human populations and in historically productive fishing grounds.

The first reason to oppose this project is safety. If LNG tanks rupture over water from collisions, negligence or terrorism, the super-cooled liquid methane rapidly heats to water temperature and turns into a gas. The gas quickly expands over 600 times and forms a vapor cloud. Sources have reported that the Coast Guard modeling has shown that an ignitable vapor cloud could spread more than 25 miles.

According to the 2002 guide for building offshore LNG terminals almost anything could serve as an ignition source at this point including vessels, electrical equipment, mobile phones, cameras, static electricity and lightning.

The only offshore LNG facility in the world is scheduled to go into operation next year offshore Louisiana and it is positioned more than 110 miles off the coast and away from populations. In California, objections have been raised to LNG facilities offshore that, according to one estimate, could put 70,000 people at risk. Massachusetts should not dismiss these safety concerns simply based on assurances from the developers. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has announced that it will hold off approving any new LNG projects until its LNG Safety Report comes out, probably by the end of the year.

The second reason this project should be opposed is that it will become a major disruption to critical fishing grounds near Stellwagen Bank. The area that Excelerate Energy wants to establish this unloading facility in is only 10 miles from Gloucester, in an 800 sq mile area (30 by 27-miles) on Stellwagen Bank known as Block 125. Both commercial and recreational fishing, as well as lobstering, takes place here. For centuries, this area has been one of the most productive fishing grounds for our fishermen on Stellwagen Bank.

Already there is talk of vessel exclusion zones of one to three miles around the LNG tankers when they are unloading at either of the two unloading buoys. When vessel traffic becomes congested with additional tankers waiting to unload, will fishing vessels be required to leave the entire area?

Since the passage of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the number of days that commercial fishermen can fish has been reduced dramatically and fishing grounds have been closed for part of the year in order to protect both the fish and the ocean habitat. On Stellwagen Bank, for the last seven years, Block 125 has been closed to fishing for seven months of the year in order to preserve the integrity of fish stocks. At present, it is closed four months of the year to protect spawning fish and because it has been designated an essential fish habitat. If this project goes forward, fishermen will no longer be able to fish there at all and the conservation efforts and fishing industry sacrifices that have taken place over the last three decades by fishing communities will have been for nothing.

Also, the proposed facility in Block 125 is one mile from the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary. In 1986, both commercial and recreational fishing industry advocates lobbied to protect Stellwagen Bank by having part of it declared a Marine Sanctuary. This facility will be located right next door!

The LNG tankers that will be unloading nearly 365 days of the year will be one thousand feet long or the equivalent of more than three football fields. The Gloucester fishing fleet is made up of small boats 30ft to 60 ft in length most of which fish primarily on or near Stellwagen Bank. How will they be protected from being split down the middle in good or bad weather by these enormous tankers? The tankers will not even know that they hit them.

The third reason to oppose this project is that the pipeline construction will disrupt the ecosystem. Lobstermen have already seen the guarantees of minimal impacts from the Hubline project vanish when construction fell behind schedule. Problems were encountered on the seafloor, which were not anticipated by the companies. This will almost certainly happen again if they are allowed to move forward on this gas pipeline.

Is it not ironic that fishing vessels, such as draggers and scallopers, are constantly accused of destroying the ocean bottom with their fishing gear but trenching a path large enough to bury 11.5 miles of pipeline on the ocean bottom is not considered destructive of the habitat?

Is it not ironic that lobstermen and gillnetters must bring up their pots or nets if a whale is spotted so the whales don't get caught in them but LNG tankers can travel freely throughout areas where whales feed with no thought for the possible impact of these huge tankers on the whale population?

Is it not ironic that commercial fishermen must get permission each day from NOAA to use the fishing grounds and can be denied access to them but multimillionaires who have the resources can propose such a project with no thought given to the preservation of the ocean as a resource, the possible danger to local communities, or the destruction of people's livelihoods?

In conclusion, fish are a renewable resource that with proper attention can be there forever. In recent years, the commercial fishing industry has been reduced drastically in order to preserve the Atlantic Ocean for future generations. Natural gas is a finite resource and will someday be depleted leaving only debris and contamination in its wake.

It is our responsibility to supply the nation and the world with fish for food, so it is our responsibility to protect the ocean that gives us that food and to remember that it is a renewable and fragile resource. This is why the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association invites all in the community to join with us in opposing this project.

*The Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association can be accessed at <http://www.gfwa.org>*

### **YEMAYA**

ICSF's Newsletter on Gender and Fisheries

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Please do send us comments and suggestions to make the newsletter more relevant. We would also like names of other people who could be interested in being part of this initiative. We look forward to hearing from you and to receiving regular write-ups for the newsletter.

Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.