

# FIRST MEETING OF THE FISHWORKERS OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

*Valparaiso, Chile, 27 June to 1 July 1988.*

Our meeting was held in the port of Valparaiso, Chile, 27 June-July, organized by FETRINECH and FETPCHAP, Chilean and Peruvian fishermen's federations, with support from the following NGOs from the same countries: CESLA, ECONIN, PET, IPEMIN and the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF).

For the first time in history, fishermen from trawlers, industrial and commercial boats, artisanal fishermen and fish-processing plant workers from Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras and Guatemala, representing more than half a million fishworkers, came together for a meeting like this. Italian and Spanish fishworkers also sent delegations, and the ILO sent a delegation to participate with observer status. Some of the agreements reached:

- According to official figures, 12 of the 16 million metric tons of fish landed in 1986 were used for fish-meal and fish-oils. Another three million were used in export products, and pitilessly, only what was left, some one million tons went to feed the region.

What is most serious about that situation is that it took place at a time when more than 70 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean were undernourished or simply dying from hunger.

As fishworkers, we proclaim that we will not rest till we humanize this activity, that is to say, till it becomes the main source of animal proteins needed by the poorest of the poor and the most needy in our region, guaranteeing the most basic of all rights, the right to food.

- As fishermen or fish-processing plant workers, we declare that extraction is highly irrational and predatory. Management and administration of resources are not based on serious scientific research. To the contrary, they only seek to increase production and profits.

We will fight to defend hydro-biological resources and for good management, in which scientific criteria are used for national fisheries policy, which we fishermen have helped to elaborate and adopt. We call for fisheries laws for managing the sector, ministries of fisheries where they do not already exist, and for the governments of neighboring countries to sign agreements concerning management of resources common to both countries.

Most fishermen are artisanal, with 400000 workers and more than 100000 boats spread throughout the region.

Their operations, with a few exceptions, are threatened by industrial fleets, tuna boats and refrigeration ships. We therefore declare that an exclusive area should be established in all countries, not only to allow for the normal reproduction of species, but also to ensure the working and living conditions of our artisanal colleagues.

As fishworkers, aware that this is the most forgotten economic sector, we proclaim that we will fight so that they have technical support and credit for their training and renovation of their equipment. Also, to avoid abuses that arise from shipowners classifying industrial and artisanal boats, we state that a boat should be classified as artisanal not only on the basis of capacity, skills and equipment, but also and especially so that its crew not depend on someone like a shipowner.

- We fishworkers declare that we will fight against every open-seas policy and against everything that harms the sovereignty of our nations, and also against the free operation of any kind of boat that comes into our waters, whatever its flag, because that is the most corrosive expression of the transnational corporations of the seas. That means we also denounce the false nationalizations taking place in our region by changing flags.

We are not opposed to the operations of trawler fleet factory ships when they work under agreements, with concessions and licenses regulated by technical and scientific criteria, that is, their work is regulated by the availability of the species. We will not allow factory ships to operate with foreign fishing officers and with less than 80% of the crew being local seamen; and for boats under local flags, we demand 100% local crews.

- We denounce the innumerable and at times criminal contamination of our rivers, lakes and seas. Industrial plants, mining complexes, agricultural pesticides and often urban waste are discarded into bodies of water. The worst examples of this are the nuclear explosions in the Pacific.

If the great powers are uninterested in the life of our seas, and if entrepreneurs and governments are

also indifferent to the ecological balance of our sea and continental waters, we fishworkers state that we will launch as many campaigns as needed to guarantee the existence of species of marine fauna at the service of civilization. We will even bring those responsible to the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

- We fishworkers began to fish as children, and in most cases, we work till we are no longer able. Practically all the fishermen in the region have no assistance, retirement or social security system. Rights as basic as a daily and weekly work schedule; obligatory day-off once a week; holidays; compensation; retirement; insurance against accidents, occupational and other illnesses are all unknown to fishworkers.

Fishing is still today the most risky of all jobs, seven times more so than, mining. Therefore we will fight for the obligatory incorporation of systems of assistance, retirement and social security for artisanal fishermen; rights financed by 1% of the value of fisheries exports and for which the State and we artisanal fishermen, with solidarity, will set up social security funds in our harbors, fishing communities or ports. We will also fight for retirement at age 50, that companies provide accident insurance, for a 48-hour work week, weekends off, at least eight hours of rest a day and paid holidays that can be taken.

In an activity like ours where hundreds have died on the job, we will fight for our boats to have obligatory systems and equipment for the safety of human life on board, for air support and hospital boats to provide first aid and for partite hygiene and safety committees in fishing companies.

- The exercise of trade union, work and human rights for the fishworkers of the region is related to our present force and organization and the form of government in our countries. In countries under dictatorships, even fishing cooperatives are considered subversive. In most of the countries of Central America and the Caribbean trade union activity is persecuted and prohibited, and engaging in it means risking their lives for the fishermen in those countries. They are sometimes forced to work without provisions. Anyone who demands their rights while working is thrown overboard. They are considered to be guerrillas or drug traffickers and are jailed in neighboring countries. Common criminals attack

their boats, killing any fisherman who resists.

We will continue our struggle till international public opinion becomes aware that in that part of the region even the most basic human rights are violated, and we will not stop till these colleagues recover their condition of human beings and the dictatorships that support this situation are overthrown. For this reason, this first meeting has established a working commission composed of delegates from Argentina, Chile, Peru and Uruguay, who in the following months will knock on every door they need to and personally travel to those countries to register our complaint, in representation of more than 500000 fishworkers.

- We want to express our militant solidarity with fishworker movements in Africa, Asia and in all the countries of the third world, with which we identify and we hope to unite for the greater organizational force of fishworkers throughout the world. The same is true for those peoples who are struggling against dictators or for their liberation.
- The meeting established a permanent commission with three delegates from each of the participating countries (one for industrial fishermen, another for artisanal and a third for industrial plant workers). It also established an executive committee composed of one delegate each from Peru, Chile and Argentina, to carry out the campaigns the meeting decided on, edit a quarterly bulletin at the regional level and convoke the second meeting of Latin American and Caribbean fishworkers, scheduled for the first week of July of next year in Peru. The meeting also discussed and adopted a proposed set of statutes to be presented to the grassroots membership. They will be on the agenda of the second meeting and provide the clearest expression of the aspirations of thousands of workers: Latin American and Caribbean Fishworkers Union-UTRAPESCAL

*For the unrestricted defense of our resources.*

*For the recovery of our dignity.*

*For the respect of human, trade union and employment rights.*

*For the struggle against hunger and malnutrition.*

*For the permanent executive committee.*