



36th 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 year marks the 10th anniversary of the endorsement of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) by FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI), and we, the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF), the World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP), the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), La Via Campesina (LVC), members of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC) are concerned that the SSF Guidelines continue to receive limited recognition. After a decade, and despite the significant contributions of small-scale fisheries to global employment, livelihoods, and food security and sovereignty; small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples are still under recognized and marginalised. More alarmingly, this year small-scale fisheries have been completely erased from the COFI agenda, and relegated to the Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management.

We have expressed concern on numerous occasions that approaching small-scale fisheries simply as a management issue is inadequate for addressing the broad scope of issues related to small scale fisheries, including human rights, access to resources, protection of biodiversity, and social development.

Under the guise of the Blue Economy, small-scale fisher peoples have seen their rights snatched away, and national institutions softening laws and regulations in favour of corporate interests and investments. The IPC has witnessed the failure of the national institutions to adhere to the fundamental principle of inclusive and democratic decision-making, where custodians of coastal and inland waters, territories and livelihoods participate in decisions directly affecting their lives – including those related to food production and natural resources.

We call upon our governments to address the lack of inclusion of small-scale fisheries and Indigenous Peoples to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes – including related to policy formulation, pre- and post-harvest activities, and resource management. Governments must ensure that consultations are carried out, enabling active, free, effective, meaningful, and informed participation of local individuals and groups in decision-making processes, before implementing any activities or projects that may affect the lives and livelihoods of small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples.

We therefore urge our governments and intergovernmental bodies to support organizations and movements led by small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples to ensure legitimate representation and effective participation in determining development trajectories.

We also call upon our governments to formally recognize and protect small-scale fishers and Indigenous Peoples, with particular attention to youth and women, by implementing the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines. Small-scale fisheries, which as highlighted by the FAO's Illuminating Hidden Harvests Report, accounts for a significant proportion of global fisheries, is essential not only for food security and sovereignty, but also for preserving coastal and inland communities and our cultural heritage.

The IPC also emphasizes the importance of regularly discussing the implementation progress of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). This ongoing dialogue is crucial for strengthening ocean governance and addressing climate change and food security as intersecting issues. Furthermore, it is vital to reintroduce discussions on small-scale and artisanal fisheries within COFI, the foremost global forum for policy debate in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

Considering all of the above, the IPC would urge the Committee that COFI continue as the forum to address strategic and policy issues related to small-scale fisheries, as a stand-alone agenda item.