

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 14 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 fisher peoples, encompassing diverse groups of traditional fishermen and fisherwomen, women and men seafood collectors and gatherers. We invite the world to listen to our voices to advance, protect and safeguard our collective and traditional customary rights, through the implementation of real solutions for our Peoples.

We, as representatives of national and regional organizations of fishers from 50 countries counting over 10 million fisher peoples, reiterate the message that fisher peoples –peoples of the waters and oceans– are the custodians of our planet's waters and are right-holders working and mobilising for food sovereignty, biodiversity protection, and lifeways that are in harmony with nature. However, our survival and thriving depend on systemic changes to the global food system, on transformation away from the dominant capitalist model of economic expansion, and on governments recognizing, protecting and advancing our historical customary rights on land, inland waters, coasts, mangroves, seas and all our traditional territories.

We are living in a world in which conflict, wars, and climate disasters are accelerating hunger and poverty and escalating loss of lives and livelihoods, affecting especially women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, racialised, lower caste and marginalized communities. We strongly condemn the use of starvation as weapon of war. We stand in solidarity with the fishers and all the peoples of Palestine, demanding the protection of their right to self-determination and an immediate end to the ongoing genocide. Our fisher peoples all around the world are suffering from internal conflicts including those related to the so-called "war on drugs" and other conflicts such as those taking place in the West Philippine Sea, Lebanon, Sudan, Yemen, Ukraine, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Myanmar and the Sahel countries. We call on all nations to honor international law and human rights as the foundation for peace-building among peoples.

Our fishers and Indigenous Peoples continue to suffer from the ongoing violation of our traditional customary rights, especially in the access to and control over our territories, due to the promotion of false solutions to the climate crisis, the advancement of industrial aquaculture, extractive industries, coastal development, and historical and ongoing conflicts between industrial and traditional fisheries. The privatization of fishing rights through policies such as Catch Shares and Individual Transferable Quotas, often disguised in the name of Rights-Based Fishing, exacerbates this situation by concentrating fishing rights in the hands of the few "quota lords" while expropriating the vast majority of fisher peoples in the entire value chain.

As fisher peoples, we are facing devastating impacts from false solutions like Marine Protected Areas, Marine Spatial Planning and carbon trading in our territories. The "30x30" target – conserving 30% of oceans and land by 2030– backed by governments, conservation NGOs and corporations, represents neo-colonial conservation that violently displaces us from our waters and territories. When we defend our environments and practice our livelihoods, we face criminalization, harassment, and violence from rangers, private security, and state forces. This fuels racist and caste-based persecution, wrongful convictions, and unjust imprisonment, tearing our communities apart. However, not all conservation is oppressive. Many of us successfully protect nature through democratic, community-led Marine Protected Areas. We will continue resisting neo-colonial conservation including 30x30, while we advance our own community-led protection of nature.

We reject false climate solutions such as Blue Carbon, carbon credits and biodiversity offsets. We

also resist the so-called sustainable massive Wind Farms, and other 'green energy' projects that are being constructed everywhere in the world by displacing and destroying fisher peoples' traditional territories and way of life.

Industrial aquaculture, particularly the shrimp industry, has destroyed over 60% of mangrove forests and displaced millions, posing a severe threat to our fishing communities and food sovereignty. These industrialized fish and shellfish factories –rebranded as "aquatic foods" or "blue foods"– are falsely promoted as sustainable alternatives to capture fisheries. In reality, their expansion pollutes our waters and bodies with toxic chemicals, intensifies food insecurity, and further marginalizes our peoples, especially impoverished women seafood collectors and gatherers. The expansion of industrial aquaculture, promoted by transnational corporations and our governments, results in escalating violence, with our women bearing the heaviest burden. We are expropriated from our traditional territories, mangroves, and gathering grounds, while facing criminalization, harassment, abuse, and even killings. This systematic displacement under the banner of 'sustainable aquaculture' destroys our traditional livelihoods and undermines our food sovereignty.

Industrial fishing is closely related to industrial aquaculture, as growing amounts of fish caught by industrial trawlers are processed into feed for aquaculture. This increases pressure on wild capture fisheries, reducing fish abundance and threatening the food sovereignty of traditional fishing communities and the people we feed. We will continue our fight against industrial fishing as this form of extractivism is worsening the global food crisis and exacerbating biodiversity loss and environmental destruction.

We are witnessing collective struggles from across the world, by communities who are being dispossessed. The struggles and socio-cultural stigmas associated with traditional fishing livelihoods have driven our youth to seek opportunities outside traditional fisheries, due to lack of social recognition of traditional fishing as a dignified way of life. This is often leading to migration to urban areas or to other countries, threatening the ancestral connection to our waters, central for the continuation of our cultural heritage and the flourishing of our current and future generations. We stand behind our youth in their right to participate in decision making processes at national to international levels and in the defence of our territories, livelihoods and food sovereignty.

Women are central to traditional fishing ways of life. We mobilise for the recognition and visibilisation of the contributions of our fisherwomen, women shellfish gatherers and collectors. The discrimination against women in decision making processes at any level including in cooperative systems, and government regulatory frameworks is a main threat to the realisation of our rights. Women are leading battles against efforts to wipe out our histories and homogenise our fishing identities and cultures. It is fundamental to consider women as guardians of mother nature, agroecology and biodiversity. Women's perspectives and rights should be fulfilled in public policies, programmes and legal frameworks. Fisherwomen, women gatherers and collectors are already advocating for our rights in our 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, colonialism, and imperialism. Governments have separated the land from the sea through policy reforms and development projects, yet Indigenous Peoples have coexisted with nature and protected our fishing territories since time immemorial. Land and the sea are intricately connected. Over half of the world's rivers now face declining water levels and droughts due to climate change. Changes linked to rising sea levels; plastic, chemical and nuclear pollution; dam construction; coastal oil and gas exploration and exploitation; sand and deep-sea mining; and industrial aquaculture and fishing threaten their lives and territories. Inland fisheries must be explicitly acknowledged in national and international frameworks, ensuring their inclusion in policies and the recognition of their customary

and traditional rights and lifeways.

We respond to these threats, building solidarity with other social movements through the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC). We remain committed in participating in politically legitimate multilateral policy platforms related to food, fisheries, agriculture, climate, biodiversity and human rights where we can advocate for our rights and interests. We consider the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and its regional fisheries management bodies, the UN Committee on Fisheries, the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the UN Human Right Council (UNHRC) to be the UN agencies that support the creation and the implementation of global governance with our active participation. In particular, we demand the implementation of the Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines and to advance the inland fisheries agenda, as the basis to guide all items being discussed in at COFI, while at the same time guiding the creation of public policies for small-scale fisheries through the UN Decade on Family Farming. We also continue to engage in the Human Rights Council processes, including its special procedures and treaty council, as a means to present empirical evidence of the ongoing violation of our collective and traditional customary rights and to put fisher peoples' human rights at the centre the UNHRC processes.

We demand that fisheries subsidies negotiations should be kept out of the WTO, and any negotiations should be brought to COFI under the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization's Sub-Committee on Trade. Everywhere costs of production are rising, food and fuel prices are increasing, and we have more and more difficulties to access our seas and waters. We demand supportive public policies now to continue to practice our livelihoods, protect our customary rights, and provide nourishing food for our communities.

As the social, climatic, economic and political crisis intensify, our resistance grows stronger. Through the Nyéléni Global Gathering Process, we are building a powerful response that connects local and global struggles. This multi-year mobilization brings together thousands of grassroots organizations and allies to advance food sovereignty alongside climate, social, economic, racial and gender justice.

We are mobilising our peoples and forging powerful alliances to defend our waters, our lives, and our future. Born of the oceans and waters, we rise together in an unstoppable tide of resistance. The time for action is now.

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