

Plenary of the 93rd Session 2005 of the International Labour Conference
Wednesday, 15 June 2005

Statement of the
International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)

1. The International Collective in Support of Fishworkers would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Committee on the Fishing Sector for the successful completion of its deliberations towards a comprehensive standard for work in the fishing sector. Such an all-encompassing legal instrument—flexible towards the bottom of the fishing capacity pyramid, and stricter towards the top—can contribute to the well-being of all fishers on board all kinds of fishing vessels, both in the large- and small-scale fishing.

2. The proposed Work in Fishing Convention 2005 comes at a time when fishers are taking life-threatening risks to beat decreasing catch per unit effort by dangerously expanding the area of their fishing operation both in artisanal and small-scale as well as in large-scale fishing. While some of the craft-gear combinations in the small-scale sector is now moving away from fishing in near-shore waters to fishing within and beyond the exclusive economic zone, including other EEZs and the high seas, the large-scale sector is now moving away from their traditional fishing grounds to fishing in the furthest limits of the EEZs as well as in other EEZs and in the high seas, especially in very inhospitable conditions. In the face of rising fuel costs and decreasing fish production, there is less regard paid to labour conditions on board fishing vessels.

3. Further, new countries are now emerging as distant water fishing nations. There are highly disturbing stories of poor working conditions on board, especially for migrant workers from developing countries, on board distant water fishing vessels. Increasingly, larger numbers of workers are being recruited from developing countries to man large-scale, industrial fishing operations. The proposed Work in Fishing Convention 2005 also comes at a time when several countries have announced fisheries management policies to reduce fishing capacity or to limit access to fishery resources that may have serious implications for employment in the fishing sector.

4. Undoubtedly, the proposed labour standard for fishing is well balanced and it is timely and relevant. It is of significant relevance to the globalized face of the fishing industry, which relatively contributes more to international trade than agriculture in many developing countries, especially in least developed countries.

5. It is well known that the ILO has historically set labour standards that were eventually influential in determining the scope and content of national labour legislation in many countries and we hope member countries, particularly those with coastlines, can promote and ratify this Convention, which is an important social instrument to complement fisheries conservation and management measures. We hope this Convention can give the necessary direction to make national labour legislation for the fishing sector on a priority basis, to protect the labour conditions of all fishers on board fishing vessels. We hope that the scope of these labour

standards, especially for social security, is broadened also to accommodate shore-based fishers who do not necessarily use a fishing vessel. This will have significant benefits to the women participating in fishing.

6. Since 1988, ICSF has been advocating for improved labour conditions in the fishing sector. We would like to continue to work with the International Labour Office, governments, trade unions and NGOs to promote this labour instrument in fishing and to push for its ratification and wider adoption.

Thank you.

15 June 2005