

Proudly Fishers

The World Forum of Fisher Peoples convened its fifth General Assembly in Karachi, Pakistan, with a call for united global action against inequity

On 26 April 2011 delegates from the member countries of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) reported to its fifth General Assembly in Karachi, Pakistan. While some delegates had difficulty in obtaining visas to attend the General Assembly, held every three years, the Karachi meeting had more than the two-thirds of the required quorum of delegates to officiate the meeting.

Delegates came from countries in southern and west Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, North America and Asia. They arrived in Pakistan to celebrate the fifth assembly of small-scale traditional fishers of the world, to demonstrate their unity and to reinforce a unified voice to tackle the challenges facing them. Those who were unable to obtain Pakistan visas for the meeting—due to the shortage of Pakistani consulates around the world—sent in apologies and messages of support.

The Karachi Assembly was hosted by the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF), which did an excellent job in taking care of all the logistical arrangements and involving the local fishing communities in the programmes of the assembly. The warm and culturally rich reception provided by the Pakistani hosts to the WFFP delegates was complemented by a visibly vibrant display of music, dance and performance by the fisher people of Pakistan. The assembly gave fisher people around the world a unique opportunity to get a glimpse into the struggles of Pakistani fishers.

The regional minister of fisheries was the keynote speaker at the assembly. While welcoming the

international fishing community to Pakistan, he acknowledged the plight of local fisher people. In his address he committed his government to continue to address the issues that Pakistan's fishers are struggling for, promising to find ways to improve their living conditions and to address the overall challenges that they face.

The opening address of the PFF chairperson highlighted the role that local fishers play in food security and maintaining the local economy and the role they play in the economic stability of Pakistan. While

...the PFF chairperson was particularly strong in arguing that local communities must protect their right to organize themselves...

highlighting the need for economic development, the PFF chairperson was particularly strong in arguing that local communities must protect their right to organize themselves to maintain their role in building cohesive communities that can take care of their own needs.

Local voices

This, he emphasized, was particularly critical since it was a means through which their local voice could be heard by political decisionmakers. He called for unity in Pakistan and across the world in the fight for the rights of fisherfolk.

After the inaugural session, the assembly heard individual reports

*This report is by **Naseegh Jaffer** (naseegh@masifundise.org.za), Co-ordinator, WFFP*

from the various representatives about the state of small-scale fisheries in their countries. Delegates explained the nature of the local conditions in their countries and the steps they are taking to address the challenges facing their fisheries. This exchange provided a unique opportunity for country representatives to learn from one another's strategies and organizational methods. A rich array of lessons could be drawn from the contributions of the various country representatives, and it was evident that the assembly participants drew strength from the presentations.

While the Karachi Assembly was primarily intended to continue building solidarity amongst fishers across the world, it was also meant to evaluate, and plan, the WFFP's global programme. To this end, the assembly heard reports of the WFFP Co-ordinating Committee's participation in various global meetings on food security, conservation and biodiversity, and livelihoods and natural resource management. Of particular interest was WFFP's role in the decision of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to prepare a global instrument to guide the management

Fishworkers (WFF) in this regard. The finalization of such a mechanism was accepted as a critical measure to ensure that governments, worldwide, adopt measures to protect the traditional socioeconomic rights of small-scale fishing communities. The assembly agreed to take active steps to enable local communities in WFFP's member countries to contribute to the formulation of the proposed instrument.

However, in a major attack on the COFI decision, the Assembly also reviewed, and took a strong position against, the exclusion of traditional fishers in 'developed countries' from the proposed mechanism. Delegates felt strongly that 'indigenous fishing communities' in the 'Northern countries' suffered the same effects of economic globalization, and their plight was no different from that of fishing communities in the South—hence they should also be included under the new mechanism. The assembly was united in the view that united action amongst small-scale fishers globally, without any geographic differentiation, was necessary if inequities across the world were to be recognized and remedied.

After spending virtually a whole day in debating the issue of the formulation of the proposed new global instrument in various working groups, the assembly adopted the following resolutions as its plan of action:

1. WFFP and its members will endeavour to inform and raise the awareness of local fishing communities about the Bangkok (4SSF) Statement, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). This will be done by using plain local language in an accessible form, and through alternative print and

...united action amongst small-scale fishers globally, without any geographic differentiation, was necessary...

of small-scale fisheries the world over. The assembly acknowledged it as a major achievement and victory on the road to secure a better life for people in fishing communities.

The assembly also acknowledged the role and contributions provided by WFFP's alliance with the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty (IPC), the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and

electronic media, and in focus group discussions, workshops and seminars. These activities will ensure that fisher communities are mobilized to provide their own contributions to the content of the proposed global instrument on small-scale fisheries.

2. Alongside the above objective, WFFP will also organize a range of different engagements with State officials at all levels, and with political leaders and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to inform them and seek their acceptance of the views of local fishing communities. Furthermore, WFFP will use different national-level media and other advocacy instruments to further advance the interests of fishing communities to ensure that their voices are heard when governments prepare their input for the COFI process for the proposed instrument. This will be done by striking alliances with potential allies and partners, and by organizing national-level workshops and forums.
3. WFFP will pursue international alliances with WFF, ICSF, IPC and other potential groups in order to strengthen the position of its mass-based struggles in fishing communities. WFFP will organize regional country-to-country collaboration and workshops as well as international-level meetings to co-ordinate and strengthen the drafting of a civil society code that will be used as the base document to inform the process that will create the content of the official global instrument on small-scale fisheries.
4. Small-scale fisher people in the developed and developing countries face similar challenges from globalization. In order to avoid dividing small-scale fisher communities in these two halves of the world, WFFP members in the developed countries will formulate a strategy to mobilize small-scale fishers in 'similar countries' to contribute to this process. WFFP will work to



Delegates to the WFFP General Assembly came from countries in southern and west Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, North America and Asia

facilitate the articulation of their needs and to develop strategies for their eventual inclusion into the global instrument.

The assembly then broke into working groups to discuss a range of other issues that face fishing communities worldwide. In particular, the issue of the injustices of climate change (ICC) was given a lot of attention. In this regard, the assembly adopted the following decisions:

- While studying the ICC effects on fishing communities, and on humanity and the world at large, it was decided to conduct awareness programmes by the member organizations of WFFP on the negative and destructive impacts on the earth caused by climate crises on fishing communities.
- While emphasizing the role that national governments must play to reduce the impact of ICC, it was decided that they must comply with the laws regarding climate change injustices, and that WFFP member organizations should become involved in advocacy through protests and campaigns in their respective countries.
- WFFP should build alliances with other sectors and social movements that work on ICC issues and alternatives.

- WFFP should convene an international tribunal on the impacts of climate change injustices on fisherfolk.
- It was decided to launch a mass-based campaign against marine pollution.

The Karachi Assembly also took other decisions that will inform the programme of member organizations for the next three years. These focused on the following areas: access rights and privatization; child labour and fisheries; destructive industrial aquaculture; gender equity and women's rights; transborder issues; pollution; and degradation of mangrove forests.

Toward the end of the assembly, members, in line with the constitutional provision of consensus decisionmaking, unanimously accepted the following nominated members for the new Co-ordinating Committee of WFFP:

Co-ordinators: Sherry Pictou (Canada) and Naseegh Jaffer (South Africa)

Secretary General: Mohamad Ali Shah (Pakistan)

Treasurer: Nathalia Laino (Spain)

Africa: Sid Ahmed Abeid (Mauritania) and Fatoumata Diarra (Benin)

Europe and the Caribbean: Xavier Ezabereina (Spain) and Marie Adamar (Martinique)

Asia: R K Patil (India) and Hanna Chevy O'Fiel (Philippines)


Latin America: Jorge Varela (Honduras)

Special Invitees: Thomas Kocherry (India), Dao Gae (Senegal) and Herman Kumara (Sri Lanka)

The assembly again adopted a code of conduct to ensure democratic practice and open communication amongst all the Co-ordinating Committee members.

The Karachi Assembly was characterized by a vibrant combination of conversation, debate, culture and networking. In all, it was a unique experience during which fishers of the world interacted with local Pakistani culture and struggles for democracy and human rights, bolstered by the sharp and reflective

capacity of the local community leaders. The assembly turned out to be an intellectually animated forum free of stereotypes, which allowed participants to experience typical aspects of the real people of Pakistan. For WFFP, the Karachi Assembly was an example of how people of the world can get together and share with one another diverse experiences and solutions.

'Proudly fishers' is perhaps the label that can best describe the energy and unity visible amongst fishers—men and women—at the fifth General Assembly of WFFP. Everyone left Karachi with a commitment to take forward the decisions of the assembly to their national levels, so that they can triumphantly report to the next General Assembly, planned to take place in 2013 in South Africa. 

For more



worldforumoffisherpeoples.blogspot.com

World Forum of Fisher Peoples

www.pff.org.pk

Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum