

Statement of the FAO Secretariat under agenda item 12

“Proposal of the Republic of Korea for the establishment of an FAO World Fisheries University”

Mr Chairman,

I wish to convey, through you, to the Committee on Fisheries, the considered views of the FAO Secretariat on the item on the proposed Fisheries University.

So far, the FAO Secretariat has not expressed itself on this matter before the Committee and there is some expectancy that it should do so.

The presence of this item on the agenda of the Committee on Fisheries concerned an earlier proposal from the Republic of Korea which, meanwhile, was amended.

While we fully understand that a number of countries have a legitimate interest on the matter, we would have preferred that this proposal should not be, at this stage, the subject of a substantive discussion.

We also wonder if the Committee on Fisheries is the appropriate forum for the discussion of a proposal that in fact goes well beyond fisheries. Indeed, a proposal of this nature involves programme, strategic, institutional and financial issues, as well as options regarding the overall mandate of FAO, that go beyond the mandate of the Committee on Fisheries.

Mr Chairman,

The revised proposal aims at launching a step-by-step approach, which in fact the FAO Secretariat had been calling for. We consider that, as a starting point, this revised proposal is generally acceptable.

This approach – as we see it - foresees a pilot partnership programme with a Korean university institution for training and capacity building in fisheries, on the basis of an agreement still to be negotiated.

In the course of the second half of 2017, the FAO Secretariat would prepare a proposal to the session of the Council of December 2017, in light of an evaluation of the pilot programme. The Council would then be invited to consider establishing a working group to address institutional, programmatic, financial and technical aspects associated with the proposal. In light of the experience gained during the pilot programme, its evaluation, and relevant deliberations of the working group, the FAO Secretariat and the Republic of Korea would seek to prepare a proposal to the 41st Session of the Conference in 2019.

This pilot phase is within managerial authority and, in the opinion of the FAO Secretariat, it would be premature that there should be intergovernmental review of the matter now, in the absence of complete information on all relevant parameters. The Secretariat believes that at this stage the revised proposal is not a matter for review by the Committee on Fisheries or by Members, when both FAO and the Republic of Korea should be committed to initiating and

making the pilot phase work. The purpose of a pilot programme is precisely to allow for a full assessment of an initiative in all its dimensions so that the Members will be properly informed in due course. Interventions by Members or pressure in a particular sense could only be counter-productive, detrimental to the process and prevent technical consideration of the proposal in its own intrinsic merits. In due course, the FAO Secretariat would make proposals to the FAO Council, at the end of 2017, following an evaluation of the pilot programme.

Mr Chairman,

In the Secretariat's considered opinion, it is especially important to be able to conduct this pilot programme, as the Secretariat continues to have concerns in respect of the ultimate objective of the proposal. Some of these concerns were mentioned in past meetings, but I wished to recall them briefly here, for the benefit of all Members.

(1) The management of an FAO University is institutionally and technically outside FAO's mandate, as clarified by very long-standing practice. The Organization has for many years provided technical, professional training and extension and capacity building training. However, FAO has not granted University, academic degrees, nor operated universities. This is not foreseen in the Strategic Framework, nor in the Programme of Work and Budget as approved by the Conference. At present, FAO has neither the technical expertise, nor the experience, nor the institutional capacity to manage an institution of this nature. Implementation of the proposal will require, in due course, revision and readjustments of the strategic and planning options established by the Membership.

(2) An extension of FAO's activities into the management of a university should be approached with prudence, on grounds of system wide-coherence and efficiency, which our Members have consistently urged us to achieve. And I should say that very many Members present in this room systematically lay very much emphasis on this objective. There are already various United Nations organizations and institutions, which specialize in education and training. These include: the United Nations University; the World Maritime University managed by the International Maritime Organization, which is considering an extension of its scope of activities as an Oceans University; UNESCO, that is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; and UNITAR, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research. Some of these institutions were, themselves, the result of a long preparatory process, requiring in some cases many years of preparatory work.

The FAO Secretariat is aware that some of these institutions feel that the proposal would lead to unnecessary duplication and that they would be able to deliver degrees in fisheries, in cooperation with FAO and the Republic of Korea as required. More specifically, the United Nations University – to single out only one of these institutions - has very clearly expressed its full availability and readiness to cooperate in the matter through a department of the United Nations University which could be based in the Republic of Korea.

(3) There is also a range of other concerns. Modern thinking vis-à-vis university institutions calls for broad multidisciplinary institutions, as opposed to a university that would only offer fisheries in its curricula. This would also set a negative precedent, which could be invoked in the future to establish FAO universities in other specific, sectoral areas (forestry,

soils, genetic resources, food processing, food safety, livestock, animal health...). The required intellectual independence of the institution could also conflict with positions of FAO Members. There could be long-term financial implications for the membership.

(4) The operation of an University is, inherently, a large-scale and long-term initiative that, as a minimum, requires close attention, very careful preparation and demonstrated ability for FAO and its teams to work effectively in a country and obtain the necessary familiarity in that country. In this connection, FAO notes that it has not been able to establish a Partnership and Liaison Office in the Republic of Korea, which would have been a very first preliminary step to start programmes and activities in the country.

(5) Under the circumstances, there is fear that FAO and its Members might be confronted to a situation where an institution would be merely using FAO's name and logo; acting in the name of FAO and all its Members and committing FAO and all its Members, but without FAO and its Members being able to exercise any meaningful control and oversight over the administrative and managerial operation of the University. There is a risk that it could simply be a national initiative, acting with or in the name of the Organization.

There is now already a situation that the FAO Secretariat views with some surprise where national counterparts use the name of FAO, assuming that there will be an FAO University, thus prejudging decisions that only the Governing Bodies of FAO have authority to take, after a full and informed assessment and of all dimensions of the proposal. [Reference to flyer on the FAO World Fisheries University].

Mr Chairman,

The FAO Secretariat is most grateful for the support that the Republic of Korea has unfailingly extended to the programmes, policies and activities of the Organization and there should be no doubt in this respect. We note, for instance, that the Republic of Korea has been the first country to announce a contribution to new Port State Measures Agreement.

At same time, it is essential that in an important matter, which would commit FAO and all its Members and programmes for many years ahead of us, the Secretariat should be able to make a proper analysis of the proposal and an evaluation of that proposal. These analysis and evaluation would be carried out in respect of any other proposal from any other country.

That said, the revised proposal reflects, up to a certain point, a step-by-step approach, a compromise that would allow for the initiation of work on this proposal, under an agreement still to be negotiated.

Despite our prudence and reservations, we would wish to be able to try this experience and implement the pilot phase and seek to implement this step-by-step approach. And the first step would be the negotiation of a satisfactory agreement. We believe that, for the time being, this is a matter to be addressed between the FAO Secretariat and the Republic of Korea and this pilot programme should be allowed to follow its course. In our opinion, substantive review by the membership at this stage would be premature.

We recognize, as you pointed out yesterday Mr Chairman, that it is up to the Members of the Committee to reserve to this item the treatment, which they deem fit and they may, nevertheless, decide to discuss the proposal on the substance. It is in this spirit that we have articulated these views in some detail.

In any case, in due course the FAO Secretariat would report to the Council, at the end of 2017, on the progress achieved in the implementation of the pilot programme and on the results of the evaluation of that pilot programme. This would be made with a view to allowing the Council and the Members to decide on a way forward, in an informed manner.

I thank you very much.