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FAO Committee on Fisheries Sub-Committee on Fish Trade
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12th Session, It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the twelfth session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries Sub-Committee on Fish Trade. At the outset, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Argentina, for sponsoring and hosting this important event in Buenos Aires. I also wish to convey my special thanks to our hosts for welcoming us to this elegant venue, the Palacio San Martin. As you may know this is the first time since 1984 the Sub-Committee has met outside of Europe. It is also especially significant for me that the Sub-Committee is meeting in a G77 country. Developing countries play an increasingly important role in the global trade for fish and fish products, underscoring the significance of meeting here today. In this regard I would like to thank the Government of Argentina for its financial support towards the participation of 9 participants from developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America

I am also delighted to welcome all the delegates representing FAO member countries, and the various Inter-Governmental Organizations and Non Governmental Organizations present here today. Many of you have traveled considerable distances to attend this meeting. Your presence here confirms the importance of fish trade and the work of this Subcommittee for your countries.

Over the past two years there have been many developments in the world of fish trade and we look forward to fruitful discussions of these developments over the course of the week.

The fisheries and aquaculture sector is operating in a globalized world where the markets for goods and services are increasingly interdependent. This has created opportunities and challenges for the sector. A number of recent developments underscore the linkages that exist from the point of harvest or production all the way to the market. This has been especially noticeable in relation to the concerns markets have regarding the sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture and the legality of fishing operations and of the resulting fish products that are being traded. In order to manage these concerns, markets are introducing measures that aim to certify the legality and sustainability of fish and fish products that are being traded.

The introduction of these measures set by the market and by Governments has important implications for the harvesting and production sector. Failure to comply with these new measures may result in losing market access. Many countries, and especially developing countries that rely on the fisheries sector for development objectives, often strain to comply with the additional requirements the market is placing on them. The purpose of these new measures is not open to question. The concern is rather the capacity of exporting countries, and mainly small scale fisheries and aquaculture from developing countries, in particular, to comply with them.

This Sub-Committee is the forum where policy makers from importing and exporting countries, from aquaculture producers, Coastal, Flag and Market States can help create an enabling environment for the sector to develop, while successfully addressing the challenges development presents. We all recognize that sustainable trade of wild capture fish and seafood depends on a natural renewable resource base that is being managed in a sustainable and responsible way. Market access requirements can be shaped to create incentives to achieve sustainable fisheries. The challenge is for policy makers to ensure these measures are sound, science – based, transparent and do not create unnecessary barriers to trade. Likewise, synergies and partnerships between government, industry and NGO to achieve these measures should be sought.

These issues are touched upon in a number of the agenda items you will address over the next five days. These include agenda items related to market access requirements, ecolabels, traceability and CITES.

A relatively “new” agenda item we introduced at the last session of the Sub-Committee is the Report on Trade-Related Activities in FAO. We hope this document will give you a better appreciation of the work we do outside of the confines of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade. This is not only an opportunity to inform you of what we have been doing but also for you to provide us with your feedback on what FAO priorities in fish utilization and trade should be.

The agenda item on fish trade and food security touches on FAO's raison d'être: to achieve food security for all by making sure people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives. The role of the fisheries sector is often not sufficiently recognized in this regard and we hope this work will help highlight the important role the fisheries sector plays in achieving this objective.

Likewise, I look forward to your guidance regarding the future role of FAO in verifying that fisheries and aquaculture certification schemes operate in conformity with the FAO guidelines for eco-labeling and for certification in aquaculture.

You are also aware that for the first time, we will assess the possibility of reporting to this Sub-Committee on the status of implementation of provisions of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries related to fish utilization and trade. For this purpose a draft questionnaire has been prepared by the Secretariat for your comments and finalization.

Distinguished Representatives, Ladies and Gentlemen

I will close my opening remarks by stressing the high importance of your work within the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade. Through your continuous dedication and guidance, this subcommittee continues to be a unique forum for deliberations on fish trade issues equally by developed and developing countries, with some unique recent milestone achievements such as the Guidelines for the Eco-labeling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

I wish you well in your deliberations regarding the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade

Thank you