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SPEECH

By

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OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE ICCAT REGIONAL WORKSHOP FOR
WEST AND SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES,
ALISA HOTEL, ACCRA, 13 – 14 SEPTEMBER 2006

Good morning,

Mr. Chairman, Emmanuel Quaye, Chief Director, Ministry of Fisheries
Honourable Ministers
Chairman, ICCAT
Executing Secretary, ICCAT
Invited Guests
Distinguished Participants
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be here with you this morning at the opening of this important regional ICCAT workshop for West and Southern Africa, which I believe will review information on the state of the tuna fisheries stocks in this part of African waters. This zone also includes a natural ecological management zone that is within the competence of an FAO regional fishery body.

FAO has been working with partners to conserve and manage the fisheries resources of this zone since the establishment of the Fishery Committee for the Eastern Central Atlantic (CECAF) in June 1967. The current membership of this Committee includes 22 coastal African countries stretching from Morocco to Angola and 12 non-coastal countries. The Committee's priority areas are in capacity building, improving national and regional statistical systems and reporting, evaluating fisheries resources to report on the state of stocks and recommending fisheries resources management measures to be implemented by coastal member countries.

Mr Chairman, Honourable Ministers, marine fisheries production in the CECAF area is dominated by small pelagic fish and the high seas catch is dominated by the large tunas, especially skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye. The continental shelf of the area is narrow and most catches, including the tunas, are taken inside the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The tuna catch statistics available to FAO are mostly provided by ICCAT. So FAO collaboration with ICCAT has been very useful to the member countries of the two organizations and should be strengthened.

It is known that ICCAT deals exclusively with conservation and management of tuna and tuna like species and such other species of fish exploited in tuna fishing in its area of competence, but the occurrence of shared stocks in the region and their distribution and migration patterns require a concerted effort to ensure their rational exploitation. It will also

be necessary to use sub-regional and regional approach for their assessment, exploitation and management.

Mr Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, as most of the fisheries stocks in the zone covered by this workshop have attained levels that show signs of over-exploitation, there is an urgent need to limit commercial exploitation of the fisheries resources in the zone to sustainable levels. I have no doubt that the experts will take this condition into account in their deliberations and make recommendations that will eventually contribute to maintaining the food security of the increasing populations in the zone.

FAO will continue to support member country food security initiatives that will contribute to sustaining the livelihoods of the people in the West and Southern African region.

I thank you all for your attention.