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First of all, here's to a Happy 2022 to all, and Happy IYAF!

As many of you already know, the United Nations has declared 2022 the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYAF). FAO is the key coordinating agency in collaboration with other relevant organisations and bodies within the UN system.

Small-scale artisanal fishers and fish farmers are critical in feeding the world's growing population and IYAF 2022 is a wonderful opportunity to highlight the immense value of fisheries and aquaculture to our food systems, livelihoods, culture and environment.

We are of course excited by the many opportunities that an officially recognised year gives us. And we are looking forward to working with all the relevant stakeholder organisations to raise awareness about the tremendous contribution of the artisanal sector to food security and livelihoods. We also want to draw attention to the interests of the millions of women and men all over the world that depend on the sector for their most basic needs. This means collaborating closely not only with national governments and regional institutions but also with private sector organisations, industry associations, academia and NGOs. An International Steering Committee including public and civil society representatives and others from the fisheries and the aquaculture sectors, is providing guidance on IYAF activities.

While FAO is ready to assist with coordination and provide information and communication material, activities are to be driven at the local, national and regional level. This is a great opportunity to showcase what small-scale fishers are doing locally. We are already encouraged by the response to IYAF 2022 from both government institutions and private sector associations and the establishment of many regional committees for undertaking such activities. We also hope to see committees established soon in Asia and encourage all of you to get involved.

As IYAF 2022 falls within the UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDEF 2019-2028), the two celebrations will reinforce each other and provide greater visibility for small-scale producers. Similarly, IYAF can promote more action for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030, in particular SDG 14.b. which addresses the small-scale sector and access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets.

IYAF 2022 is not only about showcasing the achievements of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture. It is about building a sustainable future for those who depend on it and the resources upon which they depend. We hope to see further progress this year on the various SDG14 indicators, including the four for which FAO is the custodian agency, such as improving the status of fish stocks (SDG 14.4), eliminating harmful subsidies that lead to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing (SDG 14.6) and increasing economic benefits for small island developing states (SIDS) and the world's least developed countries through sustainable use of marine resources and sustainable management practices (SDG 14.7).

While all UN members have endorsed the UN Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030 and committed themselves to the individual targets, co-operation is essential. Multilateral solutions and agreements require collaboration and ongoing discussion between policymakers and there will be plenty of opportunities to promote discussion in 2022.

The FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) will meet on 5-9 September 2022 and the two FAO Sub-Committees on Aquaculture and Fish Trade will meet in May and June. This year FAO will also release a new edition of our flagship publication, the FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA).

Ocean governance and the sustainable use and management of our aquatic resources will be at the top of the agenda at several major events scheduled for 2022. In February, policymakers, scientists and others will attend the One Ocean Summit in the port city of Brest in France; the Our Oceans conference will be held in Palau in April; and the UN Ocean conference will take place in Lisbon, Portugal from 27 June to 1 July.

Questions may be asked about the timing or relevance of these events and how they will guarantee progress on substantive issues affecting fisheries and aquaculture. My answer is simple: there is no alternative. Progress in meeting the specific targets of the UN Agenda 2030 has been partial or slow, and in some areas it has even taken a step backwards due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors. It is critically important to speed up any action that will advance international awareness and dialogue and move us closer towards achieving the UN SDG targets.

Together we have achieved impressive milestones in fisheries governance with the adoption of the FAO Code of Conduct, endorsement of the PSMA, the FAO Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries. All these agreements emerged from extensive international dialogue before finally being endorsed by policymakers on a global level.

My personal wish for 2022 is for all of us to work together so we can produce concrete and positive outcomes on the UN SDG14 targets - and bring an urgent end to the pandemic that has caused so much pain and suffering around the world.

Dr Audun Lem

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