

NEPAD Fish for All Summit
Abuja, Nigeria 25 August 2005

**Address by Mr Ichiro Nomura,
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**Fisheries Department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the
United Nations**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is for me a privilege and an honour to be present here among you on this auspicious occasion. I wish to say a few words on behalf of Dr Jacques Diouf, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

First of all, I want to pay a special tribute to His Excellency Mr Olusegun OBASANJO, President of the Republic of Nigeria, for this commendable and timely initiative that will allow leaders from this continent to discuss strategies on the development of fisheries and aquaculture within the context of the NEPAD Programme.

This Summit constitutes a unique opportunity to assess the present situation of fisheries and aquaculture in Africa, evaluate its trends and, finally, identify at the highest political level, priorities and directions for future action.

It is therefore with great satisfaction and interest that the Food and Agriculture Organization, and more particularly its Fisheries Department, received the invitation to participate in this Summit, as well as in its preparation, in cooperation with the NEPAD Secretariat and the WorldFish Center.

We see in this Summit the unambiguous expression of a political commitment to ensure the success of a shared and agreed objective, that of enhancing the role of fisheries and aquaculture not only in combating hunger and poverty but also in contributing to the economic and social development of the African countries and their people.

A political commitment of this nature is essential in order to reach that objective. There are also other factors that must be taken into account, since they contribute to define the objective parameters of all actions which will have to be undertaken.

On one side, there are a number of positive and encouraging elements.

The high productivity of African marine and inland waters ecosystems has made possible the significant development of important fisheries over the years. These fisheries are providing direct employment and revenue to approximately 2.6 million fishers and fish farmers. More broadly, these fisheries bring many social and economic benefits. Among them we may mention food self sufficiency and food security, improvement of nutrition, growth and diversification of exports. Therefore, in spite of the differences and variations that may be observed in the relative importance of

fisheries in the various countries and subregions, we may consider that fisheries and aquaculture contribute actively to the economic development of the continent.

To illustrate this point I just wish to quote briefly some numbers which are significant.

First, fish is important in Africa as a source of food and protein. The fish eating population in Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated at about 200 million. Fish contributes up to 50 percent of animal protein in the diet of many Africans. This is a percentage which is second only to Asia. Presently, Africa represents 6.5 percent of the world total consumption of fish. It contributes 5.7 percent of world total production. In this respect, we must also recall the vital role of small-scale fisheries. In several African countries, small-scale fisheries contribute at least 80 percent of the production.

Second, an increasing part of the production is traded internationally. The net value of African exports of fish and fish products exceed the net foreign exchange income for African international trade in cocoa, coffee or any other agricultural commodity, combined. In 2003, 36 percent of the production (live weight equivalent) was traded at regional and international level, with a large share (88 percent in value terms) destined to countries out of Africa.

It is important to stress that the situation that I just briefly described can be improved even more, since there is still significant room for further enhancement and development of the fisheries sector in Africa, for the benefit of African countries and their people.

This was the positive side. On the other side, there are a number of negative elements which we cannot ignore and which constitute serious constraints and obstacles to the enhancement and development of fisheries and aquaculture in Africa. Worse, they can lead to their serious deterioration. In this respect, I just wish to call your attention to some of the working documents which have been prepared for this Summit. They contain some alarming projections for several groups of countries, if the interested governments and fishing industry and other stakeholders fail to take specific actions to redress and rectify the current trends that may be observed in these countries.

In particular, the unsustainable levels of exploitation of fish resources and the destruction of aquatic ecosystems which are brought about by, among others, the failure of sector governance systems and illegal fishing, inhibit the capacity of the fisheries sector to respond to the pressures of a growing population and of an increasing demand for fish.

There are a number of principles and standards that countries should refer to and rely upon when defining, organizing and implementing the actions which are necessary to circumvent or eliminate such constraints or obstacles.

In this respect, you should not be surprised if I take this opportunity to insist on the importance of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries which has been developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization. Africa has played an important and active role in the negotiations that led to the adoption of the Code, ten years ago, as well as that of the International Plans of Action which have been elaborated afterwards

in the framework of the Code. The principles and standards contained in the Code and its associated instruments constitute most valuable references for the definition of policies and the adoption of measures at the regional, subregional, national and local levels with a view at ensuring the sustainable use of the fish resources while respecting fully the specificities of each concrete situation.

The international community has also the occasion to adopt periodically updated recommendations for a better and more efficient implementation of the Code. Every two years, the Committee on Fisheries of FAO meets and, on the basis of a thorough review of the situation, adopts such recommendations directed at governments, regional fishery bodies, NGOs, fish workers and other concerned stakeholders. Needless to say, African countries and the African group have always played an important and active role in the debates and negotiations which take place in the FAO Committee on Fisheries.

It is also necessary indeed to go and work more directly at the regional level. In that context, this is one of the main reasons for which the Food and Agriculture Organization has welcomed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative and decided to provide support for the realization of its aims and objectives. As an example of that support, in addition to our involvement in the preparation and organization of this NEPAD Fish for All Summit, I only wish to recall the formulation, in 2003, of a fisheries component for the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) of NEPAD as well as the formulation of fisheries components in several of the bankable project proposals which were developed afterwards.

We expect that this Summit will be successful in adopting a NEPAD Action Plan for the Development of African Fisheries and Aquaculture. We expect this Action Plan to be consistent with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and other applicable international instruments, such as the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and to define a number of priority actions to respond in an appropriate manner to the challenges that African countries face in relation with fisheries and aquaculture. These priority actions will also serve as a useful reference to target more efficiently the private and public investments which will be needed.

I can ensure you that FAO will remain present and is committed to continue its cooperation and support throughout the process of implementation of the Action Plan.

Needless to say, FAO and its Fisheries Department will also continue its work at the level of individual countries and communities as well as with regional entities, particularly the regional fishery bodies.

In this context, FAO has a number of tools at its disposal. I only wish to mention two of them, since they are particularly relevant. First, the FAO Global Partnerships for Responsible Fisheries Programme, also known as "FishCode"; second, the Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme (SFLP) constitutes a fruitful partnership between the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom and FAO.

You will understand, Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, how strong and heartfelt are therefore our wishes for the success of this Summit.

Before finalizing I wish to express our thanks to the Government of Nigeria and its people for their warm and generous hospitality which will certainly contribute to that success.

Thank you for your attention.