

**ADDRESS OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL  
TO THE MINISTERIAL MEETING ON FISHERIES**

**FAO, Rome, 12 March 2005**

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**Mr Chairman,  
Distinguished Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to FAO Headquarters and to this Ministerial Meeting on Fisheries.

I must stress the importance of your presence here and the honour that it bestows on the Organization. Six years have already passed since you were gathered in this same room to adopt the "Rome Declaration on the Implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries".

That is why the FAO Conference requested a further Ministerial Meeting to reinvigorate the process and to address the new challenges that face the international community in this area.

In this connection, a biennial meeting of Ministers of Fisheries would help FAO raise the level of policy discussions on the future of this sector. This year is also noteworthy in that it marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries.

**I. THE TSUNAMI**

In addition, a huge disaster devastated the coastal States of the Indian Ocean causing almost 300 000 deaths: the terrible toll of the earthquake of 26 December 2004 and its tsunami aftermath.

The international community reacted to the news of this tragedy with profound distress. Its response was immediate and its solidarity on the same scale as the losses and needs of the affected countries.

FAO was among the first to intervene. It provided and coordinated assistance, allocating US\$1.5 million from the limited resources of its Technical Cooperation Programme. Thanks to subsequent contributions received, the Organization has already been able to approve the use of US\$29.3 million.

In view of the situation, I thought it appropriate to modify the agenda of this Ministerial Meeting to give this event top priority.

After all, it was the fishing communities that suffered the most and remain the most vulnerable. In India, four-fifths of those killed by the tsunami in the state of Tamil Nadu were from fishing communities. In Indonesia, two-thirds of fishing vessels and gear and half the

fishing and aquaculture facilities were either destroyed or damaged. Most of Sri Lanka's victims were fishers and their families. More than two-thirds of the fishing fleet were destroyed or damaged, together with fishing harbours and other infrastructure.

Assistance now needs to be coordinated at global, national and local level for the medium- and long-term action that is required for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

## **II. IUU FISHING**

I should now like to recall the adoption – already four years ago – of the Millennium Declaration by the leaders of 180 countries. The first of the eight Millennium Development Goals is to "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger" and to halve by 2015 the proportion of people suffering from hunger in the world.

At the Conference on "Action against Hunger and Poverty" that was held in New York last September I stressed the enormity of the task and the need for States and governments to sharpen their political will to combat hunger in a lasting manner.

Fishery products play and will continue to play a key role in this endeavour.

It is therefore vital to ensure the effective implementation of the concept of responsible fisheries, as expressed in the FAO "Code of Conduct" you adopted ten years ago.

One of the main obstacles to implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries is illicit, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The causes of IUU fishing are complex and many. Its manifestations are varied. But its consequences are uniformly catastrophic and, in the worst of cases, irreversible.

### **A. Mixed results**

In 2001, FAO adopted the "International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing". An important step had also been taken in 1993 with the adoption of the "Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas". This Agreement came into effect in April 2003.

Part of the programme of work of the Organization and its Fisheries Department has been to promote implementation of the International Plan of Action on IUU fishing and to provide assistance to countries requiring it, usually in close collaboration with regional and subregional fishery bodies or economic integration organizations. A central plank has been helping countries to formulate and adopt their IUU national plans.

But illicit, unreported and unregulated fishing goes on.

The gravity of the situation was noted by the Committee on Fisheries, leading the FAO Conference to adopt a very explicit resolution in December 2003. At its session that ended yesterday, the Committee on Fisheries also endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Technical Consultation on IUU fishing that was held here in June 2004.

One major factor underlying the continued occurrence of IUU fishing is the lack of human, technical and financial resources, especially in the developing countries and in the countries with economies in transition.

But let us not forget nor underestimate the reluctance of certain States to honour their commitments under international law.

One of the most flagrant displays of this reluctance is the proliferation of fishing vessels flying flags of convenience and the fact that some countries exercise no control over the vessels that operate under their flag, either because they lack the means or the political will.

**B. Actions to be undertaken or revived**

Mobilization is therefore required at the highest political level. Your presence today is in response to that need.

The first step is to renew the commitments that already exist in instruments adopted by FAO or other international instruments.

But we also need to ensure the monitoring, control and surveillance of fishing and to make use of the advances in technology that have helped develop new instruments such as the satellite monitoring of vessels which seems to be particularly useful and promising. I therefore urge the Ministers to agree to start international negotiations for the satellite monitoring and control of fishing vessels so that we can implement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and safeguard the livelihoods of fishing communities.

The task is difficult and the time is short, but the Meeting should take heart from the potential gains that could thus be achieved in the fight against IUU fishing.

I thank you again for being here and wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you for your kind attention.