

AN EXCLUSIVE ZONE OF 0 TO 20 MILES TO BE RESERVED FOR THIRD WORLD TRADITIONAL FISHERMEN

First of all, congratulations for the first issue of the SAMUDRA Report and compliments to its founders.

The article by Tom Kocherry was particularly interesting. In the article he mentions the enactment of the "Marine Fishing Act" in Kerala State (South India) under which the state imposes a ban on purse-seiners fishing within 22 kilometres of the coast and on trawlers and mechanised boats within 10 kilometres. In Cochin, the fleet of traditional fishermen blockaded the entire harbour. This merits to be made known to all Southern countries and so are the concluding notes of the article: "...unless the small-scale fishworkers put up a sustained fight, no law will be enacted or implemented".

Our fishing experience with the 'doris' in many Southern countries (India 1968-69, and later in Brazil, Gabon, Madagascar, Senegal...) confirm that the traditional fishery sector in these countries is doomed to disappear in the near future unless trawl fishing, by national or international vessels, is prohibited within the exclusive zone of 0 to 20 nautical miles.

The importance of traditional fisheries in developing countries should not be underestimated: it represents over ten million small coastal fishermen, with a total catch of approximately twenty million tons every year, this is one quarter of the world production! This fish is destined to feed the poor and undernourished, while the major catch of trawlers fishing along the Southern coasts goes to the production of fish meal to feed cattle and domestic animals of our developed countries!

We had demanded the proclamation of this 20 miles zone even before the World Fisheries Conference, organised by the FAO in Rome 1984, took place. Unfortunately, the response to the petitions addressed to the United Nations, the Commission of the European Economic Community and the FAO did not guarantee till today that any of these institutions would take the initiative for the establishment of the 20 miles zone. Although each of them recognised the fact that industrial trawling by developed countries would endanger the very existence of the traditional fishery sector, the proclamation of an exclusive zone reserved to traditional fisheries was, in the light of the New Law of the Sea, left to the respective coastal states to decide. On the other hand we are very well aware that these governments are likely tempted to sell their fishing licences to developed nations in order to meet their foreign debt and this even if by doing so they endanger the small fishermen of their countries who, needless to say, are never consulted!

During a debate on fisheries in Southern countries, the European Parliament made it clear and I quote the speaker M. Guermeur: "... I wish to say a few words on the issue which is looked upon with much indifference by the world, namely the outrageous - not to mention criminal - practices of over-exploitation of marine resources of developing countries by some industrialised nations, Unless this practice is put to a halt, it makes no sense to proceed with the question of technology transfer...

Because we are here talking about "the colonisation of the seas" of Southern countries, the only issue seems to me the one expressed by Tom Kocherry: "that traditional fishermen and fishworkers in general put up a fight to defend their right to live for themselves and their families'. This struggle is going on in India, in the Philippines, in Senegal... and will continue unless the governments of developed countries do not assist the Southern governments in establishing a 0 to 20 nautical miles zone exclusively restricted to traditional fishermen.

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(St. Pierre & Miquelon Council for development aid and against hunger in the world),

EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS FROM AFRICA

As part of the NGO campaign launched by the ICSF, the Liaison Office in Brussels received some 14 interesting responses from various individuals and organisations, 16 letters and 2 tapes containing direct testimonies in reply to its request to several African NGO's for eye-witness accounts on the question of the fishery situation in their respective countries, fishery agreements with the EEC or other nations (if any), conflicts between the industrialised and the artisanal fishery sector, actions taken, etc..

Many of these reactions bear witness to the worsening situation of the artisanal fishermen, the violation of their traditional fishing grounds, the difficulties they face in defending their rights. Some of them mention the fact that financial aid, resulting from fishery agreements, serve in the first place - if not exclusively - to reimburse foreign debt instead of being used for the development of artisanal fisheries.

A synthesis of the many contributions will be made shortly. Moreover, many of the reactions have served already as a basis for the ICSF campaign in view of the forthcoming Lome IV negotiations between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the 66 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

(see the article on Lome IV p 7)



“Why must we gamble with the lives of innocent children in order to generate plutonium for bombs? Even to contemplate dumping radioactive waste in waters that belong to all of us as part of our global heritage is an outrage. For us to make such important decisions on behalf of future generations without taking into account the morality of using international waters as an exclusive rubbish bin is an arrogant act”

Peter Wilkinson
Oslo, 24-25 June 1989