

May 26, 2014

Open letter to the Canadian Government regarding the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries

We are writing this letter to express our deep concern regarding Canada's position with respect to the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) "Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries". These took more than five years to develop, through wide-ranging consultations with fisheries stakeholders from around the world, including those in Canada. The Guidelines are meant to complement the 1995 FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, to recognize the importance of small-scale fisheries, and to support responsible governance of fisheries and sustainable development.

Small-scale fisheries in Canada, and elsewhere, are recognized for their contribution to growth and development in coastal areas, to improving livelihoods and the wellbeing of coastal communities, and to fostering culture, tradition and Canadian heritage. Canadian fisheries have been managed, for decades, with the viability of these fishing people in mind, and in accord with the mission of Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans, to work towards "economically prosperous maritime sectors and fisheries". Further, Canadian research councils have supported many research programs and initiatives that aim to provide the evidence required to promote the sustainability of small-scale fisheries and to protect fishing ways of life.

The negotiations on the Guidelines text came to a halt at the latest and last technical consultation in February of this year at the United Nations FAO headquarters in Rome. This happened because of Canada's objection to the wording of one paragraph, which referred to small-scale fisheries stakeholders in 'situations of occupation'. While the Government of Canada may have reasons not to agree with this particular reference, it is untenable that Canada, with a relatively small population of about 35 million people, would block the Voluntary Guidelines that have the potential to benefit millions of small-scale fishers globally, including those in Canada, and to assure their access to sustainable livelihoods into the future.

Representatives of the world's small-scale fisheries are waiting for Canada to take a very important action – for us to step up and pledge support to small-scale fishing people in Canada and elsewhere in the world, by accepting the text of the Voluntary Guidelines. This text has been agreed to by all other 97 FAO member states that participated in the negotiations, including the USA and EU countries. Canada should not be the sole country in the world standing in the way of the realization of these important guidelines for vulnerable and marginalized small-scale fishing people globally.

Sincerely,

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