



**World Forum of Fisher Peoples' [WFFP]
FORO MUNDIAL DE PUEBLOS PESCADORES
FORUM MONDIAL DES POPULATIONAS DE PEC'HEURS
International Secretariat,
No.10, Malwatta Road, Negombo, Sri Lanka.**

Our struggle against Ocean Grabbing and for Food Sovereignty: We will not compromise! WFFP's position on the UN Ocean Conference.

**WFFP statement on the third UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France, 2025.
Date 18 March, 2025**

28 years ago, we founded the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), a mass-based fisher people's organisation. We formed WFFP to fight for the customary and human rights of the more than 10 million fisher peoples, encompassing diverse groups of traditional fishermen and fisherwomen, women and men seafood collectors and gatherers from 52 countries.

The so-called development projects rolled out by corporations, financiers and governments all over the world, are increasingly expropriating our fisher peoples from our territories and denying our customary rights. The rise of authoritarianism and fascism is resulting in the militarisation, criminalisation and violence against our peoples. When protesting against the so-called development projects in many countries we are arrested and beaten up. Our Human Rights and environmental defenders are at increasing risk of being criminalised, arrested, threatened and murdered.

The 30by30 agenda – fortress conservation – is pushed through from the top with big Environmental Organizations and Transnational Corporations as powerful agents. These players are successfully developing plans and policies together with our governments. This is backed by philanthropic foundations operating at massive budgets which often exceeds the national budgets for the fisheries departments in our countries. This form of state capture is a reality across the world. Governments are passing reforms that criminalize and target our traditional fishing ways of life, framing them as responsible for environmental destruction, while ignoring that fisher communities are part of a legacy of fishing traditions that are inseparable from the oceans, waters and coasts. This is being pushed while completely disregarding the real drivers of environmental destruction, the climate catastrophe, and expropriation of fisher peoples from their territories and resources.

In Belize, for example, The Nature Conservancy played a key role in brokering the Debt-for-Nature-Swap. This restructuring of Sovereign Debt was negotiated behind closed doors without any public debate and it was only later we learned the government of Belize committed to developing a Marine Spatial Plan and implement plans to meet the 30by30 target. This not only contradicts all the promises of participation in decision making and the principles of the UN Guidelines on Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries (SSF Guidelines). It facilitates a dangerous destabilization of our democracies!

We reiterate – as so many times before – our commitment to taking forward the implementation of the SSF-guidelines, and to fight for food sovereignty as the solution to healthy food based on our customary rights, cultures, knowledge and traditions.

We pledge our support to the United Nations that is firmly rooted in the values that form the basis of the UN Charter: peace, justice, respect, human rights, tolerance and solidarity. To uphold these values, each country should draw more consistently from parliaments, sub-national governments, civil society as well as the executive branch of government in democratic country-led governance on which the UN is founded.

We remain committed towards working with the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in order to advance the key principles of the SSF guidelines and our food sovereignty agenda. We will also continue to work with the UN institutions and organisations on Human Rights, including the Human Rights Council and the Human Rights Treaty Bodies. These UN institutions resemble democratically structured UN bodies where we are recognised as human rights holders and have a real opportunity to participate in decision making processes.

WFFP will not participate in the third UN Ocean Conference!

No organisation will represent WFFP at the UN Ocean Conference. Instead WFFP will organise a counter conference to raise our voice and advance our own solutions.

The UN Ocean Conference is not a permanent institution. It is a periodic high-level event decided upon by the UN General Assembly. This is fundamentally different from the FAO, for example, which is a specialised UN agency with a permanent institutional structure, dedicated staff, budget, and mandate to implement decisions. The UN Ocean Conference is led by two co-hosting countries and supported by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean and others. The agenda is shaped by these players with inputs from UN member states, civil society and private sector actors. The preparatory process involves a series of stakeholder meetings which are dominated by resource powerful actors and to which we – in practical terms – are denied access to.

The UN Ocean Conference does not lead to any binding agreement by our governments. Instead, it delivers a negotiated declaration. The declarations of the previous UN Ocean

Conferences counters several of our political positions (www.wffp-web.org/declaration-wffp-8th-general-assembly-20-november-2024-brasilia-brazil-2/). More worrying is the culture it builds in relation to the voluntary commitments made by governments, corporations, and civil society at the UN Ocean Conferences. The shift in focus towards voluntary commitments, dilutes the agency and democratic practices upheld by the UN bodies (e.g. FAO, CFS).

The UN Ocean Conference is advancing false solutions such as ‘blue foods’ or ‘aquatic foods’, to promote policy reforms, deregulation and investments in aquaculture, which is no other than the industrial factory farming of aquatic food. Our experiences with aquaculture, in particular shrimp farming, are disastrous with increasing pollution (even from certified producers), destruction of our livelihoods, ecologies and erosion of our customary rights. In some countries our people are arrested, beaten up and murdered when resisting destructive practices.

Similarly, the 30by30 agenda is expropriating our people from our territories. While we are promised jobs and growth, our experiences are more criminalization, loss of territories, erosion of our local food systems, and violating fundamental rights to life and livelihoods. In expanding fortress conservation regimes, the 30by30 agenda is subjecting our fisher peoples to armed violence, harassment and violence from law enforcement agencies, increasing the militarization of our lands and waters. The loss of lives and livelihoods, unevenly affects our women, youth, Indigenous peoples, racialized, lower caste people. Conservation should not be at the expense of the lives of our fisher peoples. Conservation should not dispossess and displace our peoples from our traditional territories, ecologies and resources. There is no conservation at the expense of the lives of our fisher peoples!

Instead of adding legitimacy to undemocratic processes and false solutions promoted by the UN Ocean Conference, we will organise an Ocean Water and Fisher Peoples Conference.

We assert our sovereignty and customary rights, reimagining our future within the oceans, waters and coasts. Together we mobilise for the protection of our territories and rights as fisher peoples!

We set the agenda; we show the solutions!

The WFFP Coordinating Committee