

Call for Input: Special Procedures (Working Group on Peasants)

Implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas

The following input is submitted by the [World Forum of Fisher Peoples\(WFFP\)](#), a mass-based social movement of small-scale Fisher Peoples from across the world founded in 1997. Today, WFFP has 29 member organizations from 23 countries and represents over 10 million Fisher Peoples from all over the world. In this input, WFFP wishes to focus on answering the question 7: What do you consider to be priority issues that need to be addressed in the implementation of the Declaration?

For WFFP, the following priority issues need to be addressed in the implementation of UNDROP:

1. Understanding of Fisher Peoples and their Fisher Commons

While UNDROP applies to small-scale fishers (Articles 1 and 2, “The present Declaration applies to any person engaged in artisanal or small-scale (...) fishing.”), the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) believes that the understanding of fishers as "fisher peoples" is insufficiently reflected, potentially leading to gaps in the implementation of UNDROP.

Since the rise of civilizations, inland riverbanks and coastal landscapes have been established and sustained by fisher peoples. Historically, Fisher Peoples view the ocean as their mother and rivers as their kin, regarding these waters as sacred ecosystems that are their source of life and well-being. As custodians of nature, they have a profound connection to their environment.

Fisher Peoples are diverse; they may be indigenous or made up of various socio-economic and cultural groups, all of whom depend on fisheries, waters, and land. For them, fishing is not merely a livelihood - it is a way of life, identity, and tradition. Riverine, estuarine, and marine-based fisher communities, along with marginalized coastal communities, have long relied on fisheries and related activities. The use of riverine, estuarine, ocean, and coastal spaces is deeply significant to fisher peoples: these spaces provide them with food, support their socio-economic well-being, and form the foundation for their beliefs, customs, and culture.

The concept of Fisher Commons, or customary commons, is critical to realizing the rights recognized by UNDROP. Historically, Fisher Peoples have viewed land, water, and fisheries as integral parts of their territories and homelands. These territories include rivers, coastal lands, oceans, brackish water bodies connected to the sea, and forests such as mangroves and swamps. Each water body holds a unique meaning for fisher peoples. Traditionally, they collectively govern, conserve, and assert their rights over these resources as part of their Fisher Commons.

However, WFFP members are increasingly witnessing the dispossession and erosion of fisher peoples' customary rights to access, govern, and use their territories. In the name of development, states are transferring ownership of Fisher Commons from the hands of the communities who have historically lived on the coast to state authorities and private entities. As a result, fisher peoples, who once identified with the land, waters, and fisheries as their source of livelihood and culture, are now being reduced to mere workers in the fisheries sector or industry. This marks a significant shift in their identity, intensifying their exploitation and marginalization.

By incorporating a deeper understanding of Fisher Peoples' ways of life and challenges, governments can implement UNDROP in a way that genuinely respects and protects their rights, livelihoods, and cultural identities.

2. Blue Economy/Ocean Grabbing

In the globalized, industrial modern world, Fisher Commons are increasingly appropriated to generate revenue for national growth. These commons are treated as state property, granting sovereign rights to governments over land, forests, and water. Nation-states are forming "Blue Deals"—ocean-based trade arrangements—to boost national economic recovery by commodifying oceans, which threatens the survival of Fisher Peoples in their nations. These efforts are aligned with satellite-based Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plans, and ecosystem-based Marine Conservation Sites, all aimed at "scientifically and sustainably" harnessing the ocean economy. However, these initiatives often result in ocean grabbing. Even democratically elected governments act as "rentier states," leasing ocean and coastal ecosystems to corporations for capital gain.

Fisher Peoples who are members of WFFP across the globe are witnessing the exploitation of customary commons and resources by global multinational corporations, undermining the sovereign rights and identities of fisher communities and pushing them to the margins. This process of appropriating fisher commons for state or private interests is referred to as "Ocean Grab." Under the guise of development, the state's appropriation and exploitation of fisher commons systematically legitimizes the alienation of Fisher Peoples from their vast ecologies, erodes their communal and egalitarian way of life, and violates the rights recognized in UNDROP, particularly Article 5 and Article 17 (the right to land and natural resources), Article 15 (the right to food and food sovereignty), Article 14 and Article 18 (the right to a clean and healthy environment), and Article 26 (the cultural right) of millions of fisher peoples, particularly in the Global South.

The Ocean, Water, and Fisher Peoples' Tribunals¹ organized by WFFP across three continents (Asia, the Americas, and Africa) have served as powerful forums of justice. These tribunals provided spaces for Fisher Peoples to share their testimonies and experiences of human rights abuses and violations, demanding accountability from states regarding their obligations to protect

¹ See: <http://blueeconomytribunal.org/wp-content/uploads/International-Tribunals-Report-on-BE.pdf>; http://blueeconomytribunal.org/wp-content/uploads/COP_Report-2022_High-Res.pdf; <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/ocean-water-and-fisher-peoples-tribunals>; <https://wffp-web.org/fisher-people-in-south-africa-seek-justice-at-peoples-tribunal/>

the human rights of fishing communities. The various Fisher Peoples' Tribunals have highlighted how state governments often work closely with corporations, acting as “brokers” for large investors, prioritizing investment over the protection of the human rights of fisher peoples, the democratic governance of their territories, and the integrity of their ecosystems.

In his thematic report “[Fisheries and the right to food in the context of climate change](#)”, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has explicitly recommended that States must revisit the blue economy agenda and protect small-scale fishers, fish workers, and Indigenous Peoples from competing “blue economy” sectors. WFFP kindly request the WG on Peasants to build on the Special Rapporteur’s report and look into details the impact of ocean grabbing and Blue Economy on Fisher Peoples.

3. Right to Food and Food Sovereignty

According to Article 15 of UNDRIP, Fisher Peoples “have the right to determine their own food and agriculture systems, recognized (...) as the right to food sovereignty. This includes the right to participate in decision-making processes on food and agriculture policy and the right to healthy and adequate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods that respect their cultures.” Article 15 also directs states to work with Fisher Peoples in advancing the right to adequate food, food security, food sovereignty, and sustainable, equitable food systems that promote and protect the rights contained in the Declaration.

However, fish farming on sea and land (commonly known as “aquaculture”), which is promoted as a solution to nutrition and food security, is expanding and negatively impacting fisher peoples' ability to realize and enjoy the rights recognized by UNDRIP. More often than not, these aquaculture projects are supported by states, which facilitate fish farming through changes in laws and policies (e.g., India’s Coastal Aquaculture Authority [Amendment] Act 2023). Additionally, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has been at the forefront of promoting the expansion and intensification of aquaculture through its [Blue Transformation](#) initiative. However, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food has cautioned in the report mentioned above against this initiative, emphasizing that hunger and malnutrition today are not issues of production. By promoting aquaculture aimed at increasing fish production, FAO is “trying to balance economic interests with human rights (para 75),” and when proposed as a solution, it is “a response to increased consumption rates (...) driven by overfishing and economic development (para 82).” The Special Rapporteur recommends that states exercise caution around aquaculture, calling for a robust regulatory regime and stricter regulation of industrial aquaculture, which carries higher risks compared to artisanal aquaculture (para 85).

Aquaculture is diverse, but even seemingly small-scale projects can harm the environment and have a profound impact on the right to food and nutrition of local fishing communities. Industrial aquaculture, in particular, is already causing significant harm to fisher peoples. In Asia, they report a range of negative impacts, including the encroachment on their lands and territories, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, water contamination, declining soil fertility, and the loss of livelihoods. Additionally, they face restricted access to fishing grounds, adverse health

effects, water shortages, and social and cultural disruption. These issues severely undermine fisher peoples' right to food and nutrition, as well as their pursuit of food sovereignty. Since Fisher Peoples play a vital role in supplying essential protein to coastal communities, the negative impacts extend far beyond their own communities.

We urge the Working Group on Peasants to focus on the unprecedented expansion of industrial aquaculture and to provide clear guidance to states on implementing UNDROP effectively.

Thank you very much.