



REPORT - 2022

# CONFERENCE OF THE OCEAN PEOPLE

26th, 28th, 30th June 2022



*Reclaiming the Ocean;  
Reimagining our future*



An online global conference organised by National Fishworkers Forum and World Forum of Fisher Peoples to assert the customary rights of the Ocean People



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# CONFERENCE OF THE OCEAN PEOPLE

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REPORT - 2022

# CONFERENCE OF THE OCEAN PEOPLE

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# INTRODUCTION



Oceans are fundamental to life on our planet. It is a delicate ecology that includes not only the resources of the ocean but the people who have been living with it historically, and traditionally engaging with it as their way of life. The ancestral knowledge and culture of these people contribute to sustaining it. The ocean is the source from where their identity is formed, inherent and indivisible from nature, becoming and prospering into an oceanic civilisation. This identity goes beyond categorising the oceanic people as fishers only (which might be their source of livelihood), but rather as the custodians of the ocean, historically and collectively belonging to both the coastal and marine environments. They assert their collective sovereignty over the ocean with a clear traditional understanding that humans cannot own the ecology. This is in contrast to sedentary agriculture-based societies that evolved and dominated over ocean based wild harvest of food through fishing, nomadic pastoral and forest dependent societies.

The sudden commitment of countries towards sustainable development of the ocean has been mainly through paradigm of 'Blue Growth' initiatives. This extraction and exploitation of the ocean is being sanctioned and validated through the Sustainable Development Goal 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development). This effort to cast the ocean as a new frontier of development has excluded the ocean people from their nation's growth model. In doing so, the life below the ocean gained primacy for the sake of the economy over the lives above the water, consisting of the oceanic people.

The oceanic communities have been living historically in harmony within the ocean ecology, whereby their ways of life incorporate the custody of the ocean through traditional and sustainable systems of capture/wild fishing. The corporate mindset, on the other hand, has narrowed the ocean ecology down to natural capital as grounding spaces for production, economy, market and development, whereby the ownership of the oceanic resources is sought to be transferred from the hands of the people who have historically lived on the coast, to the private entities. This approach of 'exploration, expansion and exploitation' was the baseline of the United Nations Ocean Conference 2022.

Unsurprisingly, the UNOC is organised by international corporations seeking to extract resources from the ocean along with elite conservationist groups – who view the ocean as the source of petrodollars and the ocean people as encroachers on this ambition. In addition, the revised draft political declaration failed drastically to address the Voluntary Guidelines for securing sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (VGSSF) in the context of food security and poverty eradication. This amounts to declaring war on the occupation of ocean people across the world.

# CONFERENCE OF THE OCEAN PEOPLE

By organising the Conference of the Ocean People (C-OP), we take on the responsibility to assert our historical and customary rights to secure the sovereignty of the oceans and protect the coastal land for future generations.

The 7th General Assembly of the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP GA-7), jointly hosted by WFFP and the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) in New Delhi, India, in 2017 gave the clarion call “we are the ocean, we are the people”. The New Delhi Declaration condemned the application of false mitigation solutions such as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Blue Carbon Initiatives, which often lead to land, water and ocean grabbing. It also vehemently opposed the justification of resource grabbing framed as ‘Sustainable Development,

‘Blue Growth’ or the ‘beautification’ of our ocean, land and water territories. However, our voices have not been heeded by the governments and policy-makers.

In 2021, the WFFP and NFF jointly hosted an International Peoples Tribunal on ‘Impacts of Blue Economy: Response of the Affected Peoples’, with the Indian Ocean people (Five WFFP Countries - Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India, Bangladesh and Thailand). For the first time in living history, the verdicts of the tribunal juries unearthed the scale of havoc unleashed in the name of the Blue Economy in these countries. It also unconditionally exposed the Blue Economy as ‘Blue Myth’

**“We are the Ocean,  
We are the People”.**

The testimonies expressed the angst of the communities who have been made vulnerable to capital and climate by the Blue Economy projects, dispossessing the fisher people, including the coastal poor, from their traditional homelands.

The statement affirmed that small-scale fishers remain excluded from decisions affecting our lives and territories. When we protest, we are increasingly met with militarised state repression. When we exercise our traditional practices and human rights, we are pushed back by the greed of capitalist development projects. Gender inequality is exacerbated under the blue development paradigm while the climate crisis deepens. However, nation-states have been systematically and rapidly moving ahead with their ocean-grabbing scheme while ingraining the blue development paradigm into the mainstream national development agenda. This is particularly so in the small island developing states and the least developing coastal countries.

Unfortunately, even in the post-COVID national economic recovery framework, exploitation of the oceans has been prioritised using the Blue Economy projects.

Nation states are making “Blue Deal”, an ocean-based trade arrangement, to ease blue businesses for this national economic recovery, with oceans as frontiers. They are being synchronised with the satellite-based Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) for oceans, Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan for coastal shorelands and ecosystem-based Marine.

Conservation sites in order to ‘scientifically and sustainably’ harness the potential of the ocean economy by indulging in ocean grabbing. Even the democratically elected nation-states are acting as “rentier states”, leasing out the ocean ecology to augment capital for corporations. Global corporations are not only exploiting our customary commons/resources but also annihilating our sovereign rights over and identities from the ocean. The recent proposal to rename ‘World Fisheries Day’ to ‘World Fisheries and Aquaculture Day’ is among the many manifestations of the historic assault on the ocean people in particular and fisher people in general.

National Fishworkers Forum collaborated with the World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and other civil society organisations to organise the Ocean Peoples Conference on 26th, 28th and 30th June 2022. The inauguration of the C-OP was done a day before the official opening of the UNOC. This is our way to dissent against the historical injustice meted out to the ocean people and to assert our rights.



## OBJECTIVES

1. To assert and reiterate the Oceans People's historical and customary rights and reiterate them as primary stakeholders in the regulation and management of oceanic economies.
2. To bring the Ocean People for the first time on a global platform.
3. To negate the approach by global majors to relinquish Ocean People to the space of 'beneficiaries' from the fisheries resources.
4. To address the vulnerability of Ocean People as frontline victims of the unfolding climate disaster, facing near extinction.
5. To expose the brutalities unleashed by the exploitative 'Blue Economy' framework on the ocean people and to challenge the UN and others for promoting BE as part of a sustainable development frame.
6. To challenge the UN, its member countries, and many of its agencies/organisations, in scripting a new future for the world and 'build back better'.



## **26TH - INAUGURAL SESSION**

# **“WE ARE THE OCEAN. WE ARE THE OCEAN PEOPLE.”**

**INAUGURAL OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE OCEAN PEOPLE TO CHALLENGE THE UNOC 2022**



# PROCEEDINGS

The Conference of the Ocean People brought forward expert presentations and depositions of ocean people worldwide. Nadine Nembhard, the General Secretary of WFFP moderated the sessions

**WELCOME  
AND  
RELEASE  
OF VIDEO**

## **Leo Colaco, Chairperson of National Fishworkers Forum, India**

Leo Colaco, senior leaders of the Maharashtra Machhimar Kruti Samiti (fishers union from the state of Maharashtra), together with with Nadine Nembhard, released a video on “Let Us Stand up for Ourselves and Stand Up for Our Oceans, “ highlighting the struggle of ocean people worldwide. The music video, a RELAA production by Media Collective, was specially made for the C-OP inaugural and has been widely shared on social media and other platforms since then.

Leo shared that the discussions around the idea of the Conference of the Ocean People had been ongoing and congratulated NFF and WFFP for making it a reality. He appreciated the presence of people on the frontline and behind the curtain for fighting for the issues of ocean people. He welcomed all the panellists and speakers assembled online from various parts of the world.

“The ocean people will be thrown away from our livelihood, and the bureaucrats and the corporations will take charge of all our traditional resources”, Leo mentioned. However, he asserted that many people have assembled to be part of C-OP, raising a beacon of hope that the familiar ocean people will unite with those in solidarity and achieve our rights. Mr Colaco ended his welcome remarks by introducing C-OP’s inaugural video. He said it must be played in as many places as possible and reach millions of ocean people worldwide.

Ms Nadine Nembhard greeted the gathering in her opening remarks. She spoke about the struggle of the fisher people in her country, Belize and the entire Caribbean region, to prevent harmful laws from being pushed onto traditional fish workers, devastatingly impacting their lives and livelihood.

She expressed happiness at more than 200 people joining COP's online conference, from across the world, on Day 1. She appreciated the hard work behind the meeting arrangement by NFF and the organising team. Referring to her 18-year-old son as a third-generation fisherfolk in the Caribbean Islands, Ms Nembhard demanded to know what is in future for the ocean people's youth within the nefarious capitalist narrative of blue growth. She spoke about the importance of traditional fishing and how it provides healthy food for the world. Talking about fishing being part of the DNA of the ocean people, she said, "we will be like a fish outside of water if we are made to identify as any other person."

She expressed her concern about the restrictions on lobster and conch fishing and that the fishing community in the Caribbean are made to negotiate with relevant authorities. She reclaimed that Ocean People must stand together for our way of life and livelihood to assert our historical and customary rights and protect our coastal land for future generations. "COP is a way to challenge historical injustices faced by the ocean people", the WFFP Secretary-General concluded.

**A NEW PHASE  
OF AN  
CAPITALIST  
APERTHEID**

**Dr Vandana Shiva, Indian scholar and Environmental Activist**

As an expert who worked for decades on the issues of agriculture and fishing, Dr Vandana Shiva shared the perils of the industrial fishery, aquaculture and loss of biodiversity. She pointed to significant challenges like fish production in labs and corporate control over the commons and the resources. She remarked, “we are witnessing a green revolution which continued the colonisation of the land, sea, and people’s lives. The idea that technology is productive and must replace people is flawed”. She called for a satyagraha (non-violent resistance) against the Blue Economy to defend “our lives, livelihoods, and commons”. Further, she added that the new ideas of the Blue Economy, including industrial bottom trawling, will destroy the living system of the sea and the marine ecology.

While studying the shrimp industry and the effects of aquaculture, she noticed that more fish are caught to feed shrimp, and seawater is brought onto the land, destroying the coastal land and ecology. Aquaculture wastes resources. She added that the pastoralists, fisherfolk, etc., are blamed for land degradation and sea degradation. She said, “show me a fisherfolk who doesn't love the sea.” She concluded her address by proclaiming that their (the corporates) green is the green of money, and our green is that of nature.

**DEPOSITIONS**

**Jason Jarvis, USA**

Mr Jarvis, is a NAMA board member from Rhode Island and is a traditional, artisanal fisherman. To him, “fishing is not something one does but who we are – something that helps craft our way of life. Kelp farming, offshore finfish aquaculture, wind farming— all of which are pushed by the government will have a tremendous impact on the lives of the fishers”, he expressed and added that there is a push to take the small-scale fisherman out of business in favour of the Blue Economy. He vowed, “till I am alive, I will continue to fight; I will continue to fish.”



Lider Gongora, leader of the fisherpeople union from Ecuador, expressed his concern about the state of deforestation of mangroves in Ecuador and many parts of Southern America. The likes of the UN and the FAO are promoting disastrous methods like aquaculture in the name of providing livelihoods. He said that 50 per cent of mangroves in the world had been lost due to aquaculture activities. Mangrove ecosystem for his community is life, “we are born here, and we belong to the coast and the ocean”, he asserted.

He said that the corruption from the government and the industries had endangered the coastal ecosystem, which protects ocean people from tsunamis and purifies drinking water. “The coastal livelihoods have also enabled our children’s education”, whereas the industries which governments endorse have destroyed the mangroves, and this destruction will be irreparable. Lider also spoke about the ALMA alliance in Latin America, aimed at protecting the coastal and marine ecosystems. In Ecuador, the rights exist for traditional communities in the constitution and many treaties – however, they are never implemented.

He ended by declaring that Ocean People have the ‘right to consent - on all coastal and marine projects initiated by governments and corporations. They cannot remove us from history – for that, we have to come together and fight against this destruction”, he concluded.

## DEPOSITIONS



### Maxima Canga, Ecuador

Mr Canga, in his presentation, shared that today artisanal fishers have to seek permission to fish. “We are reduced to being the ‘nones’ – those who have nothing. It is an abuse of our sovereignty as ocean people. Fishing people conserve, protect and manage estuaries, and he shares, “knows each leaf that falls from the mangroves.” When fishers manage the mangroves, they do it for the whole world. He added that it is sad that they (the government) are limiting fishers’ presence to only the mangroves.

Comparing the fishing between the traditional fishers and the industrial fishing lobby, Canga said that while a traditional fisher catches around one tonne of fish in a year, the industrial fishing fleet takes away a thousand times more of the fish and causes depletion and destruction.

Regarding industrial pollution, he emphasised that all the Ocean People must make it clear to the industries that they cannot change the ecosystem for gold and oil by pumping toxic chemicals into the ocean. He also expressed concern over the fish, which have developed malformations because of this.

### A K Jamaldeen, Sri Lanka



Mr Jamaldeen, chairperson, National Fisheries Trade Union spoke about the displacement of fishing communities because of the promotion of tourism and pollution of the ocean in Sri Lanka. He spoke about the geo-political games played by China and India in Sri Lanka for the lion’s share of control over the Colombo port and other infrastructure projects. Tourism, port-led infrastructure, and energy projects have become weapons in the hands of capital – to displace and alienate the ocean people from our relationship with the sea. The fisherpeople are a minority in many senses and least powerful, especially with the history of the genocide behind us.



Jones Spartegus is a PhD scholar and researcher on coastal and ocean ecology and one of the few from the fishing community in India to pursue the simultaneous path of research-based advocacy and community mobilisation. He is from Thoothukudi in Tamil Nadu on the southern coast of India and represents WFFP Youth in many international forums, including IPC. Jones started by congratulating NFF for taking the historical step of organising C-OP with WFFP for the ocean people on a global scale.

In his view, this history of subjugating the ocean people's rights in India dates back to imperialism. He traced it back to post-independence in India (1947), the 'reform' efforts through the Indo-Norwegian project brought in the concept of exploitation of the mother sea. He talked about how greed today is being advanced through the blue economy policies and the blue finance policies. He said, "Let us remember that these started as an introduction of the trawlers into Indian waters, initiated by Norwegians. The World Bank and other IFIs then supported 'Fisheries Development Projects. Projects are now being furthered through the Marine Regulation legislation and the push towards the deep sea and aquaculture. On the one hand, traditional fisher protective policies like the Coastal Regulation Zone are diluted and invalid, denying the ocean people the right to live on coastal lands. The Marine Fisheries Bill will take our rights away from the sea too. "

- In the 1980s, the NFF was born to 'protect water and protect fish. Post-1992, when the state policy changed towards production via culture fishing and fishing in the sea through joint ventures with foreign vessels, NFF took the lead in organising the National Fisheries Action Council Against Joint Ventures. NFF could mobilise the community and prevent the takeover of the oceans then.
- In 2004, the tsunami catalysed the subjugation of the rights of the fishing community. In many areas, it was used by the governments to drive out the fishing community from the coastland.

## DEPOSITIONS

- In addition, marine spatial planning is coming with different stakeholders to loot ocean resources like oil for mining. On the other hand, the Coastal Economic zones on the coastal lands are pushing for ports, tourism, and coastal industrial infrastructure projects.
- The naked loot of the ocean resources by new policies & legislations, bringing in multi-stakeholders for the grab of ocean resources, prices are aimed at the exclusion of the ocean people, taking away the sovereign rights of the community to the ecology. Referring to the discriminatory Blue Economy regime as 'Blue Apartheid', he concluded his presentation by affirming, "We are the Ocean; We are the Ocean People. We belong to the Ocean and Coast. The ocean is Ocean People's primary and sovereign right, and together, we will assert our ocean resources and reimagine our future".

### **Alieu Sowe, World Forum of Fish harvesters and Fishworkers**

Alieu represented WFF, expressed his concerns during his session on climate change, the destruction of mangroves and the encroachment by industrial trawlers. The fisheries resources are depleted day by day and govt is involved in more administrative work instead of coming up with the policies.

He said that this affects fish production and marketing for fishing people. He says that there need to be regulations that protect and guide the rights of small-scale fishers whose resources are depleting daily.

### **Clarence Oliphant , South Africa**



Mr Clarence started with a powerful assertion: "We did not choose fishing; fishing chose us". Representing the community of people fishing in inland waters and dams, he asserted that the inland fishers and the ocean fishers are no different. "Our way of life and livelihood brings us brings her in the common battle to protect waters, protect the oceans and protect the fisheries." He added that "the Ocean is not just a source for food; it is the very source of our livelihood, culture and way of life".



# MESSAGES FROM NFF LEADERS

I am attending the Conference of the Ocean People (C-OP) and NOT the UN Ocean Conference because I reject any dialogue about the oceans which does not include the voices of the Ocean people. ”

**Leo Colaco**  
Chairperson, NFF



We are the Ocean People and we reject the UN Oceans Conference as well as laws, policies, and regulations that are [#DrainingTheOcean](#) and [#DrowningTheOceanPeople](#) ”

**Laxmi**  
Leader, NFF



We are the Ocean, we are the Ocean People, and we denounce the UN Ocean Conferences which only seeks to take away our customary rights over marine environments in the name of sustainable development ”

**Kiran Kohli**  
Leader, NFF



**29TH MEGA THEMATIC SESSION**

**“DRAINING THE OCEAN,  
DROWNING THE OCEAN  
PEOPLE”**

EXPERT PERSPECTIVES AND DEPOSITIONS



## **WELCOME ADDRESS**

### **Vijayan MJ - WELCOME ADDRESS**

Vijayan opened with how this Conference is different from the UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) and is a historic event with participation from several countries worldwide.

He elaborated that corporations are hosting UNOC with a distinct agenda. This conference denounces, resists, and rejects the occupying of the coastland. The coastal and inland ocean communities have come together against the corporatisation agenda through Blue Economy ocean grabbing, all of which the governments support, and the UN is legitimising this agenda.

### **Herman Kumara - MORDERATOR**

Mr Kumara starts his address by signalling that COP is an excellent opportunity for fisher people worldwide to resist the way states are trying to hand resources to corporations. He adds that the message delivered on Day 2 is about Ocean People's customary rights.

**Makoma Lekalakala - GOLDMAN ENIRONMENT PRIZE WINNER**

Makoma Lekalakala is an African activist who has been active in social movements on gender and environmental issues, mainly targeting climate justice.

She begins by saying that COP will contribute to global change. In this session, she spoke about how the seas, mangroves, trees, and plants, look after people and that our lives and cultures are embedded in nature. This changed, she added, when we became colonised and divided by the colonisers.

“Colonisation introduced consumerism. Disturbed centuries worth of our relationship with ancestors and with nature. It has brought division among us. While we can now communicate with each other globally, we are only fighting today for our land and seas. It has brought development in the form of mining. It is a system that has made us poor. The largest threat of all this is climate change. Those responsible for our misery must be held accountable”, she expanded.

Mr Campling begins the conversation by casting Blue Economy as a global territory to create profit. He says we must look at China as a case study for this.

Pelagic imperialism in the 21st century – He states that the vast majority of the marine fishery used to be Europe’s fisheries, and now it is China’s. However, the issue is of ‘big capital’ rather than of a case of a country. Powerful states, directly or indirectly, provide economic and geographical support for their fishing capital to expand to distant waters. Countries like the US, China, and Japan, he said, look at the fishery as an industrial strategy for more comprehensive Blue economy export. Further, fisheries are also a diplomatic tool for China and Taiwan.

Role of Economic Zone - access to fish

- He states that in 1974-76, Americans dominated eastern whales, and the Japanese controlled the Western Pacific. In 1994-96, the tuna (fast breeding species) fishery industry intensified and, as a commodity frontier, became exhausted. He adds that this implied declining productivity and profitability.
- China 2015 became a global player, he said and started an intensive and extensive extraction process of the Ocean. Since then, the Chinese government has been expanding its fleet, while the Japanese have declined.
- The EEZ- where the colonial legacy of BE is most visible. The mainland territory that the control is much less than the corresponding sea space by western countries.
- The Chinese government props up their distant water fishing, he concludes, causing issues on ecology and territorial disputes.

## **Jesu Rethinam Christy from UNOC Lisbon**

Jesu Rethinam represents the National Fishworkers Forum in the World Forum of Fisher People. She is an accomplished activist, feminist and researcher who has done several work around aquaculture, marine fisheries, coastal regulation, etc., along with many noteworthy results on women in fishing in Asia. Hailing from Tamil Nadu in South India, she is among the stalwart leaders of the fishing community in India today.

She spoke about the powers controlling the UNOC, i.e. the WTO and the big NGOs who gathered together to decide what should be pushed in the UNOC, and highlighted that the main issue to be discussed is ocean governance. The UNOC does not acknowledge us as Ocean people, but to them, the ocean is for profit, she expressed.

## **DEPOSITIONS**



## **Lucio Cacao, Ecuador**

Lucio Cacao is part of the Union of Fishers in the River. His session delved into the state of fisheries and mangroves in Ecuador. His union fights for the rights of artisanal fishers.

In South America, he states it is essential to not fish for a few months for the reproductive cycle of the fish, but the industries come inside and take fish. His union is thus in direct conflict with the drives. The fishers, he said, do sustainable fishing, using nets, and are selective, whereas the sectors and trawlers use traps that take and destroy everything.

"This is also impacting our mangroves", he adds. The shrimp industry has destroyed 80% of the mangroves. He said that the fishers would go to mangroves because of no fish and, thus, would exploit these resources, leading to more misery. He also expressed his fears and concerns about the shrimp industry killing the fishers, their livelihood and their resources. When the fishers complain about these violations, the authorities do not listen to them as well.

## DEPOSITIONS

### **Kagianna Charley, Saint Lucia**



Kianna Charley is the Operation Manager of Cooperation at Saint Lucia Fisherfolk. He starts his session by emphasising how people do not understand the value of small islands. The government does not give due recognition to the sector, he added.

When there is a dialogue on the ocean and sustainability, it happens with technocrats and not with fisherpeople; hence, the best practices to save the ocean get missed. Therefore, the best methods to protect the ocean is to involve fishers.. He stressed that there is a need for bottom-up approach rather than top-down approach.

### **Saul Montutar, Honduras**



Saul is a fisher from South of Agoras, Pacific Ocean. His session elaborated on the government policies in place to maintain the sustainability of oceans. He has fought for 33 years to defend marine ecosystems.

The government, he said, tries to strengthen the sugarcane and shrimp industries and displace the fishermen. The goal is to keep fighting and improve our capacity for the ones left; otherwise, we lose our livelihood.

### **Boyisilie Mafilika, South Africa**



Boyisilie Mafilika expressed that the government gave fishing rights in his region in 2012 but denied fishing as a livelihood. The government has further secured protected marine areas, making it difficult for fishers to access the seas.

He adds that if he wants to fish certain kinds of fish, the government will not allow it. They send fishers to different areas and reduce them to having no right over their boat. He expressed his concern about businesses taking out significant chunks of fish and giving less to locals. He also spoke about the “government securing the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and denying fishers their livelihood by making it more difficult to access the sea.”

## DEPOSITIONS

### Gemal, Indonesia



Gemal, an artisanal fisher, represented KUALA-Ocean Aceh Coalition. In his session, he spoke about indigenous fishing people who have been protecting coastal islands for the longest time. However, he added that the government protects only the interests of the big industries.

### Purnima Meher, National Fishworkers Forum, India



Purnima Meher, from National Fishworkers Forum, India (NFF), talked about the women in fisheries, "During the pandemic, fisheries' activities stopped. Women were fishing around the coast for survival, but the government stopped them, leaving them nothing. Women had to migrate forcefully."

### Fathima Majid, Pakistan



In her session, Fathima Majid from Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) added, "The government has been trying to encroach on our islands. They have tried this three times as they want to build world-class cities. This will disrupt our ecology, and we have so far been able to resist it."



# C-OP HIGHLIGHTS THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FISHERIES

Women comprise 75% of the entire fisheries-related workforce, and influence fisherfolk's socioeconomic well-being and sustain fisher communities. They are equally involved in fisheries, in roles like livelihood, household, reproductive and sustaining unity among the communities.

They typically take up activities such as net-mending and preparing for fishing to post-fishing activities including auctioning, sorting, drying, smoking, salting, transporting, marketing, and other fishing-allied activities.



However, fisherwomen are customarily erased from all fisherfolk discourse, and their contributions to the fisheries economy are largely constrained to family and community sustenance, leaving them unrecognized, misrepresented, and undervalued.



Fisherwomen are also involved in industrial seafood processing activities, at all levels of the supply and value chain, from fishing to connecting the catch to the global seafood trade.

In certain coastal regions, women are also involved in fishing and collecting as well as harvesting fish, shellfish, mollusks, and crustaceans. Some women even take up diving and use primitive fishing and collecting methods in near-shore and coastal intertidal zones

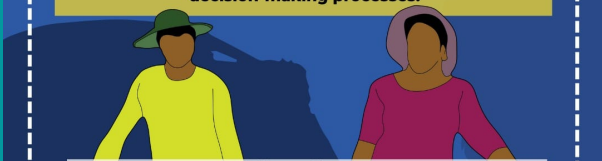


At #C\_OP2022, we will also underline women's contributions to fisheries and coastal economies, which continue to be overlooked globally. This exclusion results from defining fishing as primarily offshore, formal, paid activities which largely involve men.

Generally, fishermen access and govern seafront/ fishing commons, while fisherwomen largely sustain the landward side comprising shorelands, forests and tidal-influenced waterbodies

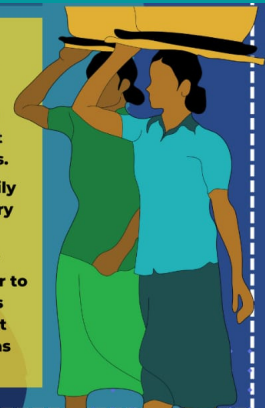


Their economic contributions are limited to household income and food security within the patriarchal family system. Fisherwomen and women fish workers are the most vulnerable marginalized sections among the fisherfolk. They do not feature in fisheries research, management, and policy, and they are not part of decision-making processes.



Key issues raised by #OceanWomen include:

- > Recognition of women's contributions to farming and fisheries to make them direct beneficiaries of state schemes.
- > Equal pay for equal work: Daily wages for men and women vary widely across sectors and standardization is necessary.
- > First rights of purchase (similar to first rights of sale) in fisheries auction processes that benefit women fishworkers working as vendors



**30TH VALEDICTORY SESSION**

**“RECLAIMING THE OCEAN;  
REIMAGINING OUR FUTURE.”**

CONFERENCE OF THE OCEAN PEOPLE  
CONCLUDES C-OP POLITICAL DECLARATION  
CHALLENGING UN OCEAN POLICIES RELEASED.



## Jones T Spartegus: OPENING ADDRESS

Jones kicked Day 3 off by emphasising that the Ocean belongs to the Ocean people. Industries and corporations are trying to take over Ocean people's resources, the WFFP and NFF strongly condone this, and this CO-P is taking a stand to affirm that - "we belong to the ocean".

### DEPOSITIONS



#### Alhaji Sayyed Alim, Sierra Leone

Mr Alhaji from Sierra Leone Amalgamated Artisanal Fishermen's Union. He shared that Sierra Leone is a small county with extreme poverty but has traditionally been known for fishing. The fishing industry is small-scale, and the government has been trying to regulate fishing.

He also shared the many challenges fishermen face in the region. A few of these are:-

- The fishing industry is not regulated
- The fishermen get shot by ships and trawlers
- When there is encroachment by trawlers, the ministry is not capable of judging these disputes. When questioned, the trawlers say, "I was within the zone. I committed no violation."
- In his speech, Mr Alhaji said that the local fishermen should be included in policy-making, especially since most fishermen lose all their property in disputes.

He raised his concern that the fishing areas have been destroyed due to the cutting down of mangroves on the coasts. To combat this issue, he emphasised that it is the responsibility of the National Protection Agencies to protect fishing areas, and there is an urgent need for a committee to be set up.

Further, he also shared challenges fishermen face, such as -

- Fishermen's voices are not heard globally; they need to be heard at the UN level.
- When corporations overfish, fishers do not get fish in the area. He remarked, "everyone is interested in fishing but not in a proper manner."
- Small-scale fishers need 22,000 per litre of fuel to go to the sea. They need fuel subsidies.

### **Jonathan Julius, Masifundise, South Africa**



Mr Julius worked with fishing communities on South Africa's coast and was the next speaker on Day 3 of C-OP. From 2000 to 2004, his trust advocated sustainable livelihoods of fishers. In 2007, they advocated for the Equality Quote, mobilising communities within Africa's four coastal provinces.

Fish is one of the primary sources of food and livelihood. Historically speaking, fishing has been a traditional practice. Even before colonisation and apartheid, fishing was present; yet, fishing is not seen as the DNA of the fishers. Fishers are instead called "beach walkers" - hunters and gatherers who collect seafood.

Apart from providing food and livelihood, fishing plays a much more critical role. It is the cultural fabric of fishers. The sea, he said, is a meditation that removes the challenges and problems in their daily lives. In recent years, fishing people have been losing access to the ocean.

## DEPOSITIONS

During the off-season, the fishing communities become ghost towns as fishing does not take place, but from March to July, one can see these towns change and come to life during the fishing season. This is how vital fishing is.

Regardless of how important fishing is to communities, they are not part of forming or implementing fishing policies. Further, traditional fishers who have been fishing for many years are not seen as small-scale fishers. Instead, the blue economy is taking shape, and coastal mining projects are being promoted.

**Sofia Monsalve**  
**General Secretary, FIAN International**

Sofia Monslave's organisation works on the Right to Food. They stand in solidarity with NFF and WFFP against the UN Ocean conference (UNOC) and recognise that it is controlled by corporations who push their interests and agendas.

She shared that UNOC has a slogan, i.e., "Save the Ocean" but in her speech, she asks, "whom and whose ocean are you saving?" She expands and says that UNOC came together to solve problems surrounding the ocean, but there are no rules on accountability and responsibility. The collectives who support the conference are profit-driven organisations, and the sea has become another frontier for natural capitalisation. The push for aquacultures he adds, but we see through this lens.

**Susan Herawati, Kiara, Indonesia**

Ms Herawati shared that her community has been facing floods in their coastal villages in Indonesia, which are close to drowning. To solve this serious issue, the Indonesian government plans to build a giant sea wall to protect against natural disasters and control floods. The question, however, she raises is whether it is required. The material for the sea wall comes from the sand from the seabed and the mountains. She asks, “Is it sustainable at all? Is this what we call sustainability?”

While speaking about the push for the blue economy, she said that the coastal communities do not need green, blue, grey, or any other coloured economy. All they need is access to their own territorial waters, and if UNOC does not talk about the welfare of the coastal community, what is the point of this conference at all?

**Josana Pinto, Brazil**

Josana Pinto is the national coordinator of the Movement of Fishermen and Fisherwomen (MPP). The next speaker spoke about the importance of having representation for Ocean people’s problems. More so now because everything that was built and is being constructed is going against ocean people. They are treated like slaves and are in danger of having the ocean grabbed by the corporates.

**Adrian La-Roda, Bahamas**

La-Roda, Chair of Caribbean Fisherfolk Organization shared the issues the Ocean people are taking with climate change and ocean grabbing head on.



**Piya Thethyam, Thailand**

Thethyam, from Association of the Federation of Fisherfolk, speaks about the situation of a small-scale fisherman when the state does not follow the law and does not give a general and fair quota to small fishers. She says this is the result of the worsening situation of small fishers.

**Velia Lucidi, Crocevia, Rome**

The International Centre Crossroad (Crocevia) express Solidarity for the ocean people to recognise ocean people, reclaim oceans, and reimagine their future. Crocevia is a Rome based organisation founded in 1958, to provide for in space for global governance for agriculture and fisheries. Crocevia is playing a key role in Agroecology and food sovereignty for the support of social movements. We believe that dominant development model based on over consumption and privatisation though liberalisation of markets cannot take into account the food for men, women and young generations in different parts of the world. These development model challenges the fair distribution and sustainable use of natural resources.

In 1996, Crocevia pioneered the formation of International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), an autonomous and self-organised global platform of small-scale food producers and rural workers organisations and grassroots/community-based social movements, whose goal is to advance the Food Sovereignty agenda at the global and regional level.

For the past 65 years, Crocevia have been supporting IPC to make the social actively engage in dialogues in international and regional platforms to take forward the Food Sovereignty agenda. One of our achievements is that our huge contribution to negotiate, endorse and implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) in 2014. Therefore, we are here at to support NFF and WFFP, to gather together and support others indigenous and farmers to put forth their agenda, lives and communities.

**Zainal Arifin Fuad, LaViaCampesina (LVC), Indonesia**

We are happy to be part of the Conference of Ocean People a parallel counter program to the UN Ocean Conference. We are facing the impacts of Blue Economy and Green Economy, in which corporations have big space and power to conduct Exploration, Expansion and Exploitation on our territory. Today, we are in hunger, poverty and grand conflicts, now we are experiencing all form of crisis such as food crisis, climate crisis, health crisis and so on.

The Corporations have big pace in the UN platforms, last year UN Food Summit was highly influenced by the corporations. We have to fight them to attain and secure food sovereignty as our fundamental right, especially we have to fight to recognise and implement Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas(UNDROP) to assert and secure our rights over the territory (resources).

Long life Fisherfolk and Long live the movement!



**Olencio Simoes, General Secretary of the National Fishworkers Forum**

Mr Simoes closed the conference by stating that the meeting is making the voices of Ocean people very clear to the United Nations. He also said that we have to rise as one voice and engage with the UN and tell them of the severe destruction of ocean grabbing, seabed mining, oil rigging, etc. “We are the historical custodians of the ocean. This online meeting will be remembered, and our voices will be heard at the UN conference in Lisbon.”

## **OUTCOME OF CONFERENCE OF THE OCEAN PEOPLE**

The Conference of Ocean People openly challenged the UN Ocean Conference and corporations that threatened the lives of Ocean people. It started as a dream by a few people and has become an international debate on the ocean people and their customary rights. This debate is not to be reduced as a mere assertion of the identity of Ocean People but an assertion of fish workers as political stakeholders who have customary rights.

The following are the outcomes from COP:

- Platformed the debate on retribution, recognition and re-imagination of the future of the ocean people to the internal level
- Reasserted the Ocean People’s stake in the ocean at a time when the global giants are wreaking havoc on land, forest, rivers and ocean
- Promised to build a future and build back better

## The Declaration from the Conference of the Ocean People, 2022



[The International Conference of the Ocean People (C-OP 2022) took place on the 26th, 28th and 30th of June 2022. This global declaration, was presented and adopted at its valedictory session held on the 30th June 2022 C-OP. It brought forward the diverse historical claims and testimonies uniting the ocean people for the first time on a global platform asserting their historical traditional customary rights over the ocean. It showcased the diversity within the ocean people as we participated and shared our views from different parts of the world like South America, the Caribbean Islands, Africa and the Asia Pacific. We witnessed tremendous mobilisation from South Asia, where hundreds of people from the coastal states in India and Sri Lanka joined the C-OP 2022 via community screenings on the ground, boosting C-OP's mass participation. Joining our people in this pioneering event were academicians, civil society groups, experts and international media members.]

We, the world's ocean people, have come together at the C-OP 2022 to assert that the oceans and resources, including the seas, shorelands, forests, estuaries, mangrove wetlands, and inland water bodies, are an integral part of our lives. We, the collectives of ocean, coastal and inland communities worldwide, stand united in asserting that our oceanic civilisation is our 'way of life and that we are the historical custodians of the ocean ecology. Through this declaration, we affirm that "We are indivisible from the Ocean: and the Ocean is indivisible from us". We reiterate that there cannot be the ocean without the ocean people and vice versa.

Our reclamation of marine resources has special significance in the context of the lopsided 'Ocean Conference' organised by the United Nations (UN). The ocean is constantly treated as the economic frontier for 'sustainable' investments, especially after the international economic downturn, following the COVID-19 pandemic. Ocean ecology, which includes our homelands, is erroneously valued at several trillion dollars and is being illegally rented to multiple 'stakeholders' in the name of 'Exploration, Expansion and Exploitation. Through Blue Economy projects, this is thrust upon people as part of the essential post-COVID National Economic Recovery. In this light, the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-2022), its agenda, programming, and the list of participating actors, reveal that it will enhance ocean grabbing and legitimise 'blue washing', entrenching the influence of the corporate actors (productive and finance capital) as well as philanthropic donors and big international environmental organisations in ocean economy decision making. We reject the commodification of the oceans and commercialisation of the lives of the ocean people.

At this historic C-OP 22, the ocean people voiced our objection to how our ocean resources are being leased out for the Blue Economy projects through Marine Spatial Planning financed by pro-blue international institutions. Our waters (Marine and Inland) are being packed with Seafood (Blue) Trade agreements, promoting intensive fisheries production technologies. Through the commitments of 30X30 biodiversity targets, 30% of our coastland is being slated out for 'conservation' purposes, bringing it under marine protected or conservation areas. The remaining coastal lands are taken for coastal economic zones, such as tourism beaches, energy extraction sites, petrochemical hubs, ports, etc. Inland water bodies have also been occupied for industrial aquaculture activities. Thus, all our waters, coastal lands, forests, and mangroves are all being usurped, now more so under the garb of post-COVID economic recovery.

The introduction of 'climate resilient infrastructures' for 'sustainable ocean economies', alienating the stakes of the ocean people on the ocean and its resources, is nothing but 'climate colonisation'. In this context, where are we, the ocean people, expected to go? This is our homeland. Where are our rights? This is a process of Blue Apartheid, of constantly dispossessing our people of customary rights, perpetrated through 'blue fencing'.

In response to the ongoing United Nations Oceans Conference, the Conference of the Ocean People, thus, would like to affirm and declare the following '**R**'s as our core principles. To the effective inclusion of ocean people in our assertion of historical, traditional, and customary rights to the ocean and its resources to protect the sea and ourselves as the custodians of the Ocean:

We **REJECT** the corporate-led false climate solutions and mega Blue Economy proposals of the UN, its member nations and corporations, who are neither stakeholders of the oceans nor should be the primary decision-makers. We remind the world that the earth has been brought to its current disastrous state of affairs by these very companies and their capitalist, colonial greed.

We demand the **RECOGNITION** of the Ocean People by nation-states and international organisations. We are here to assert ourselves, affirm our presence and articulate our historical and traditional customary rights over the oceans. We also re-assert our rights to capture fisheries;

We demand **RESTITUTION**, whereby the Ocean People unitedly reclaim the customary governance of the ocean, demanding the redistribution of marine resources. We demand restitution of ocean governance to ocean communities;

**RESISTING** the blue paradigms, we call upon governments to review and change international governance regarding the oceans, which are 'Draining the Ocean and Drowning the Ocean People'.

We demand an immediate moratorium on all Blue Economy policies and projects that erase our identities, lead to the extermination of ocean people, and thus contribute to blue imperialism; and

We demand a **RE-IMAGINATION** of our future within the ocean, whereby the ocean and its resources are responsibly brought back to us and conserved for future generations.

We declare this as urgent, necessary and possible!

## **Our Ocean; Our Rights; Our Future**

# **ENDORSEMENTS**

## **INSTITUTIONAL ENDORSEMENTS**

### **AFRICA**

Elmolo – Kenya

UFFCA - Uganda

SLAAFU – Sierra Leone

National Fishermen's Collective (CNPS) – Senegal

Copotang – Democratic Republic of Congo

NAAFO – Gambia

Masifundise – South Africa

Friends of Earth (FOE), Africa

### **ASIA**

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association

Caritas DaLat, Vietnam

Coastal Action Network(CAN), India

BARCIK, Bangladesh

SHISUK, Bangladesh

PKMT, Pakistan

Friends of Earth (FOE),India

Pakistan Fisher People Forum, Pakistan

Friends of Earth (FOE), Bangladesh

PPNI, Indonesia

Friends of Earth (FOE), Malaysia

Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy - India

Programme for Social Action(PSA), India

Social Needs Education Human Awareness (SNEHA), Tamil Nadu, India

Herman Kumara, Director, NAFSO, SriLanka

Ravadee Prasertcharoensuk,  
Director Sustainable Development Foundation Thailand

Nibras Fadhilillah, KIARA, Indonesia

Focus on Global South,  
Walden Bello, Founder - Philippines

Focus on Global South  
Shalmali Guttal, Director - Thailand / India

## **EUROPE**

FIAN International, Germany

International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), Rome

TransNational Institute (TNI).., Netherlands.

## **AMERICAS**

COORDINADORA NACIONAL PARA LA DEFENSA DEL

ECOSISTEMA MANGLAR (C-CONDEM), Ecuador

Comité para la Defensa y Desarrollo de la Flora y Fauna del Golfo de  
Fonseca

(CODDEFFAGOLF), Honduras

Movimento dos Pescadores e Pescadoras (MPP), Brazil  
Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA), USA

Sindicato de Trabajadores del mar (SITRAMAR), Panama

CoopeMoluscos Chomes R.L, Costa Rica

Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO), Caribbean  
Friends of Earth (FOE), Brazil, India, Malaysia, Bangladesh & Asia  
Pacific.

## **INDIVIDUAL ENDORSEMENTS**

Kumi Naidoo - SOUTH AFRICA  
Senior Advisor for the Community Arts Network (CAN),  
Special Advisor to the Green Economy Coalition  
Global Ambassador, Africans Rising for Justice, Peace and Dignity

Justice Anjana Prakash -INDIA  
Justice Supreme Court of India  
Makoma Lekalekha, Director - SOUTH AFRICA  
Goldman Environmental Prize Recipient Africa, 2018  
Nick Steele Memorial Award: Environmentalist of the Year 2018  
Earth Life

Vijay Prashad Director INDIA  
Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research

Tushar Gandhi, President - India  
Great Grandson of Mahatma Gandhi  
Mahatma Gandhi Foundation

Paula Satizabal, Honorary Fellow - Australia  
University of Melbourne

Ashish Kothari, Founder - India  
Kalpavirksh

Liziwe McDaid, Strategic Lead - S.Africa  
2021 Eco-Warrior Gold Award recipient, S. Africa  
2018 International Goldman Environmental Prize Recipient, Africa  
The Green Connection

Nancy Fraser  
Loeb Professor of Philosophy and Politics, New School for Social Research  
Research Fellow, Heilbroner Center for Capitalism Studies  
Visiting Research Professor, Dartmouth College  
Global Justice Chair, Collège d'études mondiales, Paris

Vandana Shiva  
Director Research Foundation for Science, Technology & Ecology

India  
Dr. Mira Shiva  
Director Initiative for Health Equity & Society  
India

Antoinette Anderson  
Voice for the Voiceless,  
South Africa United Against Seismic Blasting and Corruption.  
S. Africa

Felix Mallin  
Postdoctoral Researcher  
University of Copenhagen  
Denmark

Rebecca Borges  
Postdoctoral Researcher  
Universidade Federal do Pará  
Brazil



Jennifer Silver  
Associate Professor  
University of Guelph  
Canada

Anna Isabele Marquez Perez  
Associate Professor  
Universidad Nacional de Colombia (Sade Caribe)  
Colombia

Nemer E Narchi  
Professor Investigador Titular TC  
Centro de Estudios en Geografía Humana, El Colegio de Michoacán  
Mexico

Martha Micheline Cariño Olvera,  
Profesora investigadora Departamento de Humanidades  
Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur  
Mexico

Lina Gutierrez Cala,  
Investigadora,  
Independiente  
Colombia

Gisselle Vila Benites  
PhD Student, Graduate School of Geography  
Clark University  
USA

Judy Marcela Chaves Agudelo,  
Investigadora  
Universidad Nacional de

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## **Organising Committee of Conference of the Ocean People (C-OP):**

Primary organiser: World Forum of Fisher People (WFFP)

Lead organisers: National Fishworkers Forum (NFF, India) & National Fisheries Solidarity (NAFSO, Sri Lanka)

**Facilitating organisations:** SNEHA, The Research Collective-PSA, Delhi Forum

## **International Coordination:**

Nadine Nemphard (Secretary General, WFFP)

Naseegh Jaffer (African region)

Carsten Pedersen (Trans National Institute)

Jesurethinam (NFF) & Herman Kumara (NAFSO)

**Solidarity and Mobilisation** - International: KIARA (Indonesia), SDF (Thailand), PFF (Pakistan), Masifundise (South Africa), NAFSO (Sri Lanka)

**National mobilisation (India):** KSMTF (Kerala), OTFU (Odisha), APTFU (Andhra Pradesh) TNFWS (Tamil Nadu Fisher Women Federation), Nagai Fishers Federation (Tamil Nadu), MMKS (Maharashtra), GRE (Goa), SMS (Gujarat) and RFTU (Ramnad, Tamil Nadu)

## **Event Coordination Team**

Jesurethinam

Nirmala Karunan

Jones Spartegus

Sonu Yadav

Olencio Simoes

Vijayan MJ

## **Documentation**

Evita Das

Gargi Adhikari

Shabina Siddiqui

Aishwarya Bajpai

**Social Media & Outreach team**

Musthujab Makkolath  
Arun Mohan  
Evita Das  
Godavar  
Yashada Sawant  
Savita Vijayakumar  
Jones Spartegus  
Vijayan MJ  
Jesurethinam  
Nirmala Karunan

**Live Interpretation online**

Ayaz-Interpreters Coordination  
Siddharth-Bangla  
Dolvyn-Portuguese  
Paula-Spanish  
Kaptan-Thai  
Nibras-Bahasa  
Shilpa-Malayalam  
Aswathy-Malayalam  
Suraj-Hindi  
Amit-Hindi  
Pushparayan-Tamil (India)  
Rohit-Telugu  
Vaishnavi-Tamil (India)  
Nimal Pereira-Tamil (Sri Lanka)  
Francis Raajan-Sinhala  
Latha-French

**Tech management**

Ashish Kajla  
Arun Mohan  
Jibin Robin  
Vijayan MJ

**Website**

Tito Chandy

**C-OP inaugural song**

Shankar Mahanand  
Santhosh George  
RELAA  
Media Collective, Delhi  
Community choir, Thiruvananthapuram

**Report compilation and Editorial work**

Savita Vijayakumar (Primary editor),  
Jesurethinam, Aishwarya Bajpai,  
Jones Spartegus, Vijayan MJ

**Session facilitators**

Leo Colaco  
Jones Spartegus  
Herman Kumara  
Nadine Nemphard  
Vijayan MJ

**Report design and layout**

Savita Vijayakumar

# CONFERENCE OF THE OCEAN PEOPLE



## C-OP 2022

