

11th of December 2017

FISH TRADE, FISHERIES SUBSIDIES AND SDG 14

High Level Session co-organized by UNCTAD, FAO, UN Environment and the Commonwealth

Statement by UN Environment

We are happy to be part of a very effective partnership between UNCTAD, FAO and UN Environment in supporting countries to reform fisheries subsidies and build a conducive policy framework for healthy oceans and sustainable investment and trade. On behalf of UN Environment, let me first take the opportunity to thank our partners at UNCTAD, for their leadership in organizing this event.

To understand the stakes involved at this 11th WTO Ministerial Conference, we must remind ourselves that in dealing with fisheries, we are dealing with the oceans, a global commons. Oceans play a critical role in maintaining life-support systems, they stabilize the climate and sustain animal and plant life. As such, they constitute over 90% of the habitable space on the planet. Only the high seas outside of national jurisdiction are truly 'commons'; but fish species, and other living resources, pollution, and other adverse effects of economic development do not respect these legal boundaries and will not be contained within a State's Exclusive Economic Zone.

The Global Commons have historically been guided by the principle of common heritage of humankind, which represents the notion that those common goods regarded as beneficial to humanity, should not be unilaterally exploited by individual states. Rather, they should be governed under some international arrangement for the benefit of humankind as a whole. An agreement at this year's Ministerial Conference towards eliminating environmentally harmful fisheries subsidies could bring us closer towards this vision.

To move forward, it is necessary that we understand that preserving and restoring healthy marine ecosystems is not a trade-off to economic objectives. The health of our oceans is the

very basis for economic activity, for livelihoods, for food security, for poverty alleviation and for protecting our planet.

The international community is aware of the disastrous impact of fisheries subsidies on our marine ecosystems and biodiversity, and the role they play in undermining the very basis of our well-being and economic prosperity. Based on SDG target 14.6, we require a commitment of States that addresses illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, but also overfishing and overcapacity.

Particularly in developing countries, a large part of the coastal population relies on fisheries resources for their livelihoods. For them, sustainable use, conservation and management of fisheries resources, is indispensable. At UN Environment, we have developed sustainability criteria that can guide countries in the design of fisheries policies to assure long-term environmental, social and economic sustainability of fishing activities.

In order to support countries to effectively implement provisions, a special and differentiated treatment for developing countries, in particular the most vulnerable, will be indispensable: A well-designed differential treatment regime will make an agreement more - not less - effective by helping countries to build capacity to prevent IUU fishing and to put in place effective assessment systems to monitor overfished stocks. Exceptions that undermine the effectiveness of the agreement itself, however, would result in a lose-lose situation, also for small-scale and artisanal fisheries that these exceptions might try to shield.

Reaching an ambitious outcome at MC11 provides the WTO with an opportunity to show that it can play a role in addressing a global commons issue that affects us all. Likewise, it would offer Members a chance to demonstrate that they are serious about the commitment they issued under the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda.

At WTO level, already in 2005 at the Hong Kong Ministerial, there was broad agreement to strengthen disciplines on fisheries subsidies. This year, at the UN Oceans Conference, the General Assembly reaffirmed their commitment to support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 of the 2030 Agenda – including by accelerating work to complete negotiations at the WTO on this issue.

Let us not wait any longer to address an issue that is long overdue. Let us make use of the momentum here at the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference to aim as high as possible, in order to reach a meaningful outcome – to safeguard a global commons, in the interest of humankind and our planet as a whole.

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