

Around the fisheries world in 90 days

by *Ussif Rashid Sumaila*

January 14, 2008 marked the end of my quiet days in the first quarter of the year, when I took off to Nha Trang, Viet Nam to attend a training workshop organized by the World Bank

and the WorldFish Center. Other trips in January were to Penang, Malaysia, to give a lecture, and Washington, D.C. to participate in a workshop on corruption in fisheries at the World Bank. February came with its own list of places to visit. My first stop was in Boston, USA, where I attended the 2008 American Association for the Advancement of Science Meeting; then to Kiel, Germany to participate in the final Steering Committee Meeting of the European funded Incofish project (www.incofish.org/index.php). Next, I went to Dakar, Senegal, to participate in a documentary on fisheries in West Africa, and, finally for



Participants at the Peruvian Marine Institute meeting (L-R): Renato Guevara-Carrasco (FAO), Rashid Sumaila, Astrid Jarre (University of Cape Town), Rafael Rey Rey (Minister of Production, Peru), Gerd Winter (University of Bremen, Germany), Claudia Wosnitza-Mendo (Peruvian Marine Institute, IMARPE) and Carlos Benites (Peruvian Marine Institute, IMARPE). Photo by Unidad de Comunicaciones e Imagen Institucional del IMARPE.

the month, I travelled to Ottawa, Canada to serve as an expert witness on fisheries subsidies and the World Trade Organization, at the February Meeting of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans in the Canadian Parliament. March took me first to Monaco, where I was invited to chair a session at an international seminar on governance of high seas biodiversity (the Prince of Monaco was in the audience). Second I went to Lima, Peru, where I was asked to give a talk at IMARPE, Peru's National Fisheries Research Institute, on the need to establish a socioeconomics research unit at the institute. My final visit of the month was to

Rio Grande, southern Brazil, where I contributed to the design of a new project on climate change and fisheries, based at the Federal University of Rio Grande (www.labmon.io.usp.br/projects/sacc-CRN2/SACC_CRN2.html).

In the next few paragraphs, I select a few of the activities undertaken during my 90 days around the fisheries world, and provide some details.

The goal of the Nha Trang training workshop was to equip World Bank task managers and program officers from partner development agencies to make informed judgments about how to address fisheries and aquaculture concerns in 'poor projects' and policy interventions. As part of the workshop, three innovative parallel sessions (denoted 'clinics') were organized so that participants could offer peer-critique and suggestions addressing fisheries project or policy reform efforts, underway or under preparation in different parts of the world. I participated in a session on a current initiative of the Vietnamese Ministry of Fisheries, which has the goal of reducing the current

Continued on page 2

The Sea Around Us Project Newsletter

Issue 46 – March/April 2008

Continued from page 1

overcapacity in the country's inshore fisheries. It was revealed during this clinic that subsidies given by the Vietnamese government to the inshore fishing sector decades ago, to spur development, are a key reason for the current overcapacity in the country's inshore fisheries. Ironically, the government is currently giving subsidies to the offshore fishing sector in the country - repeating the mistakes of previous decades. In my opinion, the single most important policy action that Viet Nam can take immediately is to stop subsidizing the offshore fisheries and to use the savings to help fishers move on to other activities (Teh *et al.* 2008) – otherwise, a few years from now, another group of experts will have to be convened to advise Viet Nam on how to reduce overcapacity in the country's offshore fisheries - when it may well be too late!

My contribution at the corruption in fisheries workshop was based on a report I co-authored with Jennifer Jacquet (cms.iucn.org/search.cfm?uNewsID=202) for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). My intervention briefly highlighted the main stages in the fish chain where corruption can take place. Basically, we concluded that corruption happens both on and off the water – i.e., it occurs

throughout the entire fish chain. I ended my intervention by calling for high priority to be given to drastic reduction of corruption in fisheries by all interested parties. Tackling corruption is absolutely necessary if our goal is to use fishery resources sustainably into the long, distant future.

In Boston, I attended the 2008 American Association for the Advancement of Science Meeting (see also www.ubc.ca/aaas/). I participated in two sessions, one of which I co-organized with Kate Newman of WWF-USA. The other was organized by the Fisheries Centre's Mimi Lam, entitled 'Privilege or Right to Fish' (see *FishBytes* Vol. 14 Issue 2). The goal of the session I co-organized was to explore how we can learn from the collapse of northern cod off Newfoundland to help protect tuna stocks, currently facing pressure from overfishing. Session contributors were Barbara Block (Stanford), Jose Ingles (WWF), Mark Kurlansky (Ballantine Books), Daniel Pauly (UBC), Andy Rosenberg (University of New Hampshire), Renne Subido (Growth with Equity in Mindanao, Philippines) and Kate Newman (WWF). Together, we made the case that continued mismanagement could force some tuna populations to quickly go the way of northern cod - a highly threatened fishery that once helped shape economies of whole nations. It seems our call is already being heeded - on June 16, eight Pacific nations banned tuna boats from an area of ocean

almost the size of Alaska "to save the fish from a repeat of the collapse of Atlantic cod fisheries in the 1980s" (www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601101&sid=aqOdnFHgH1k&refer=japan).

My briefing and the discussion that followed on fisheries subsidies at the Canadian parliament brought to the fore the key reason we still have problems managing our environmental and natural resources sustainably: i.e., the ever-present pressure to trade off future environmental and natural resources in order to minimize current socioeconomic pressures (see www.seaaroundus.org/NewspapersF.htm). This behaviour is now being played out with the current increase in fuel prices (Sumaila *et al.* in press) and the call for fuel subsidies to the fishing sector, to which many governments are succumbing. Until we find a solution to the problem of how to balance the flow of present versus future benefits from our natural environment, we will continue to degrade the environment, with potentially significant impact on the wellbeing of not only future generations but also young members of the current generation.

References

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