



Regional Conference on
“Building a future for sustainable small-scale fisheries
in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea”

7-9 March 2016 - Algiers

**Opening Address by Arni Mathiesen, ADG-FI
FAO of the UN**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Representatives of IGOs, NGOs and CSOs,
FAO and GFCM Colleagues
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my sincere pleasure to welcome you to the Regional Conference on “Building a future for sustainable small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea” here in Algeria. I would like at the very outset of my intervention to commend the hosting country for their excellent organization of such an important event which has drawn considerable attention from the people of the Mediterranean and Black Sea region. In fact, I am pleased to note that nationals of countries outside this region are also in attendance and I know they are looking forward, as much as everyone else, to the discussions of this conference.

I gather that the genuine interest which is generated by this conference is, in large part, linked to the implementation of the *FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and*

Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). This visionary instrument, which was adopted in 2014 by the FAO COFI at its 31st session, has been praised at many different levels due to its fully-encompassing character. The SSF Guidelines underpin a human-rights based approach. Consequently, the potential of SSF, including its numerous linkages to topical issues, ranging from socio-economic drivers, to the right of indigenous people and decent labour standards, is presented as a point of departure on the path that should lead us to sustainable development and blue growth. The SSF Guidelines advocate a very simple concept, that is, to end the marginalization of the SSF sector so as to ensure full participation of all SSF stakeholders in decision-making processes and, ultimately, end poverty and food insecurity. Ultimately, even the UN Sustainable Development Goals have recognized the importance of SSF; indeed, I am pleased to affirm that the FAO has been instrumental in building momentum at the global level for this crucial issue by negotiating for and adopting the SSF Guidelines.

The time for celebration, however, is now over. As much as I like to recall and stress the strenuous efforts of the FAO for the adoption of the SSF Guidelines, this is part of the past. The focus has now shifted to a much more challenging task, that is, the implementation of the SSF Guidelines – a topic which, as I have mentioned, draws considerable interest.. The FAO has been working diligently to organize regional consultations on the implementation of the SSF Guidelines throughout the world. For example, in December, regional consultations for the Near East and North African region, which were co-organized with the GFCM, were held in order to raise awareness of all actors on the importance of implementing the SSF Guidelines and in order to promote strategies for how this should be done. Admittedly, it will not be an easy exercise because it calls for tailored approaches in each and every region of the world. We need to adapt the SSF Guidelines to the realities of SSF, however, these realities differ enormously depending on the local communities, local social and economic conditions, the status of the resources and numerous other factors. The Mediterranean and Black Sea region is possibly the region where the most progress seems to be possible in the short and medium term. The Near East and North African regional consultations have, among others, recommended that this conference make specific proposals in relation to the implementation of the

SSF Guidelines. Furthermore, we know that the GFCM is strongly committed to this task.

Moreover, the FAO recognizes the importance of Mediterranean and the Black Sea SSF not only through the GFCM but also as a result of the long-established work of its regional projects, namely AdriaMed, CopeMed, EastMed and MedSudMe. These projects have been working closely with the concerned countries and partners to improve understanding of the SSF sector and to support its future development. They are fully collaborators with the GFCM on the preparation of the First Thematic Session of the Conference which, I am confident, will raise awareness on existing SSF-related issues in the region. I would also like to recall that the FAO supports the regional SSF sector through its fisheries officers in its regional offices. Some of them are also here with us today and I am exceedingly pleased to witness this level of synergy within the Organization.

In conclusion, allow me to convey to you my sincere wish to see this conference muster the collective experience and expertise, which is here in Algiers today, so as to identify the best means for tailoring the SSF Guidelines to the reality of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Together we can contribute towards the implementation of the guidelines and I strongly rely on the strong leadership of all the partners of this conference. I must also express my sincere gratitude for the organizers of this event, with particular regard to the GFCM Secretariat, for their strenuous efforts. I am very pleased to see that their continued work, which has been going on for months, culminates in such high-standards conference that required constant coordination and attention to details.

I wish you a fruitful conference in this beautiful city and success in your endeavours.

Arni Mathiesen,
FAO-ADG