

Speech for Opening of the FiTI International Secretariat

Mr. Sven Biermann, Director

Victoria, 28 May 2019

Excellency, President Faure,

Excellency, Vice-President Meriton,

Principle Secretaries,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to be here. Today clearly marks a major milestone for the Fisheries Transparency Initiative, which we started about 4 years ago. We are very honoured and grateful for your presence, Mr. President, which is a testimony of your personal role and commitment in championing good governance and the blue economy.

We are equally grateful for the government's commitment to host the International Secretariat of the Fisheries Transparency Initiative in the Seychelles, in one of the world's most important fishing regions.

So, while today is truly a day for celebration, kindly allow me to add a few remarks, reminding us why we are here today and where we still need to go.

And for that, it's important to acknowledge that coastal countries and island nations all around the world face a complex challenge: ensuring that fishing and fish trade contribute to income, employment, food and nutrition for millions of people, while also conserving marine biodiversity for future generations and considering the impact for other sectors.

This complexity stems from the fact that in order to achieve sustainable fisheries, we need to consider economic, social and environmental aspects. But these are often not perceived as supporting each other; to the contrary, they are often seen as conflictive.

But the notion of the word sustainable makes it clear: these three dimensions are interdependent, and in the long run none can exist without the others.

This interdependence makes also something else quite obvious: addressing this complexity is unlikely to be met

by a single actor or a stakeholder group alone. Instead, complex matters such as sustainable fisheries or even more so sustainable blue economies need a collective effort by all relevant stakeholders to incorporate a variety of perspectives, experiences and expectations to make sound and fair decisions. This is why we have in the Sustainable Development Agenda not only goals for a number of specific challenges (vertical goals) – such as poverty, climate change, gender inequality, oceans – but also with Goal #17 a horizontal goal that demonstrates that the realisation of these challenges must be addressed by all of us, by forming multi-stakeholder initiatives.

If we come back to sustainable fisheries, this idea of stakeholder collaboration is nothing new. Almost 25 year ago, the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries already stated that *“states should ...facilitate consultation and the effective participation of industry, fishworkers, environmental and other interested organizations...”*.

But how can these stakeholders, that clearly have a stake in the fisheries sector, participate in a meaningful way if

they do not know what the current situation in the sector is. If it is not transparent with whom the government has fishing access agreements, how much money is made from fishing licences, how much fish is taken out of the water, what is the contribution of the artisanal sector, not only in economic but also in social terms, etc.

And this is where the Fisheries Transparency Initiative comes in. Because it defines for the first-time what kind of information needs to be published in the public domain by governments so that meaningful participation, better decision-making as well as effective oversight and accountability can be pursued.

Those requirements were not developed by us or by one single group. It was a true global multi-stakeholder effort over 2 years, where government representatives from e.g. the Seychelles, Mauritania, Indonesia, Sweden, representatives from commercial fishing and artisanal fisheries, civil society organisations, but also intergovernmental organisations like the World Bank, the

FAO, African Development Bank and the European Union participated.

They all came together sharing the same conviction: while there are many aspects to achieve sustainable fisheries, the public availability of credible information is a critical one.

Without transparency governments cannot function to their potential. For example, we see increasingly that foreign investors, suppliers, retailers and international donors base their investment and sourcing decisions on an assessment of the quality of a country's governance as well as political risks. Empirical evidence shows that where countries improve transparency and meaningful participation between governments, the private sector and civil society, then this can boost economic growth and foreign investment. For coastal states this may become increasingly important given the attention for new investment and financial support for achieving and developing sustainable 'blue economies'.

But the FiTI is not only relevant for governments. By supporting the FiTI, the fishing industry for example can avoid the consequences of poor levels of transparency, often resulting in mistrust and suspicion, often leading to unwarranted and unfair criticism.

Governments, local fishing communities, civil society, private companies, investors, retailers and partner countries engaged in fishing agreements stand to benefit from good and transparent management, ensuring a long-term contribution of the fisheries sector to the national economy and the fair balancing of economic, social and environmental aspects.

But let's also not be naïve. There are still many actors out there that benefit from a lack of transparency. We all talk about transparency, but it is still not the norm. Or in other words, if there were not such flagrant violations of best practices, there would be no need to insist upon transparency! Which means that there is still a lot do.

This is why it is so important to have now a permanent home for the FiTI, rooted in a nation that is heavily reliant on its fisheries, and from here being able to engage with all actors from around the globe and seeking to achieve a global level playing field of transparency in fisheries. But it is equally important to have countries like the Seychelles with their commitment and courage leading the way in this quest – and setting inspiring examples for others.

Excellency, Mr. President Faure, Excellency Vice-President Meriton, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the FiTI International Board, the global Secretariat and all the actors who are promoting and already implementing the FiTI across the globe, thank you again for making the beautiful island of Mahé the new home of the FiTI and we are looking forward to work with you closely to advance transparency in fisheries all around the world.

Thank you, merci beaucoup, mersi.