



Hearing on the EU-Mauritania fishing agreement protocol

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Presentation by Sid'Ahmed Abeid

President of the artisanal section of Mauritania National Federation of Fisheries

Contact: abeid11957@hotmail.fr

Parliamentarians,

Mr Rapporteur.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity you have given to an artisanal fisherman from Mauritania to speak as an expert in this Committee.

My name is Sid'Ahmed Abeid, and I am the President of the Mauritanian Artisanal Fisheries Federation. I have been a fisherman for more than 35 years.

As you know, Mauritania is a developing country. 35 years ago, small-scale fisheries in Mauritania, comprised the Imraguen traditional fishing communities fishing for mullet, and the wolof Mauritanian fishermen from the Ndiago region. A new fishing activity started at that time, and it has helped make artisanal fisheries an engine for social and economic development of our country. This is the octopus fishery. I can tell you, because in 1978 I was the first artisanal fisherman who started fishing for octopus.

At the time, I remember it well, there were only 17 artisanal boats. We were catching a few fish, including dogfish, which at home we call *tollo* - but we were only selling our products for 7 ouguyas, - 2 eurocents - per kilo. In 1978, some people from the Japanese cooperation came to see me and told me that it was possible to catch octopus with pots, and that this would give a very high quality product that we could sell to them at a very good price. So, I decided to give it a go. I tried all kinds of materials to make my pots: cement, PVC, cans - but nothing proved ideal: pots would break; they were too fragile or too heavy.

One day, I went to Las Palmas, and I found that the Spanish were selling water in bottles of five liters that were just the right size for my pots. I went to see the people at the bottle

factory, and I bought 4000 bottles from them. They adapted them to make pots for me, and I sent them to Mauritania.

The result was excellent! And as this happened just after the great drought of 1973, many Mauritians who had migrated to the coast began to fish octopus with pots, like me. A few years later, in 1984, when the SMCP - the Mauritanian society for the marketing of fishery products - was created, we were the first ones to supply them with our products.

Today, we are 36,000 fishers and we have a fleet of 7,500 artisanal boats. And when seen in terms of the overall octopus catches, we, the artisanal octopus fishermen provide 60% of the national production in quantity and 70% in value. We provide 90% of the employment in the fishing sector, with people working in 50 freezing plants, in 12 boat building workshops, in hundreds of stores for the sale of equipment, for fish selling, transporting, etc. The added value of the artisanal fisheries sector is 8 times greater than for the industrial fisheries sector.

What I'm telling you about here is what we call DEVELOPMENT in Mauritania.

But we want this development to be sustainable; we want our fishery to be a sustainable fishery.

First, it is important to remember that fishing with pots is a selective fishing method: the octopus hides in the bottom of pot, and we take it out by hand. If it is too small, we put it back, alive, in the sea. In any case, as we put quality first, small juvenile octopus are of no interest to us.

Secondly, in recent years several measures have been taken towards improving sustainability:

- We now implement biological rest periods of 4 months a year;
- We put in place a minimum weight for octopus catches, of 500 grams gutted
- We are finalizing a second fishery management plan, which will allow fishing capacity to be controlled.

I also want to highlight how some European States are supporting these efforts for sustainability:

- the French cooperation, the AFD, funded all the studies needed by our factories to comply with health standards; they also funded training of fishermen on safety at sea, donating lifejackets as well;
- the German cooperation has for many years been investing in strengthening control and monitoring.

In recent years, we have also been trying to diversify our activities. In particular we want to develop the artisanal fishery for sardinella, as the Mauritanian population is now turning to this fish for their daily diet.

Up to now, this fish has been caught near the coast in areas up to 20 meters depth. But what we would like to develop is a fleet of more solid artisanal boats, allowing fishermen to go safely in deeper areas.

As sardinella are a stock shared with our neighbors in West Africa, and as this resource is very important for feeding people throughout our region, we are discussing with our Senegalese and Gambian fisher colleagues to see how to promote a joint management arrangement, which would give priority to small-scale fisheries and to the supply of local markets.

I am explaining all these ideas we have to you about developing our sector sustainably in order that you, members of European Parliament, understand the challenges of our partnership with Europe. Because Europe is, and will remain, our first partner in fisheries. But this partnership has to be fair.

We have been fighting for that since 1996, first at the national level, and then at international level. Thanks to our international reach, today I can come and speak to you directly.

And I also want to tell you this: we have the material resources; we have the human resources to catch our octopus in a sustainable manner, and much of our other resources too.

What can be caught by the Mauritanian fishermen must be reserved for them. So, please, **LET US CATCH OUR OCTOPUS OURSELVES!**

This is the same message we have given to our Government when it negotiated an agreement with the Chinese company Poly Hondone in 2011, which was against our interests.

We campaigned, mobilized our citizens and the media, organized workshops, and held protests in front of the offices of the administration. We confronted our officials on television to tell them the same thing: Let us catch our octopus ourselves!

For us, this is non-negotiable, because this is our livelihood, and the food and jobs for our people.

Regarding the agreement with the Chinese, we received good news last week: the Government indicated that the activities of the Chinese company Poly Hondone were to be limited to small pelagics and the President of the Republic announced that the conditions made to the Chinese, and other foreign fleets, would be the same as the conditions made to the Europeans. He added that octopus was to be reserved for Mauritanian fishermen, particularly those in the artisanal sector.

The technical conditions made to European fleets, for us, they go in the right direction.

First, they allow us to catch our octopus ourselves. This for us is the essential part of the Protocol.

New fishing zones are also a positive development.

To push trawlers further off the coast will help protect the seabed, decrease competition with our pirogues and also reduce by-catch.

To give you an example, do you realise, here in the European Parliament, that half of our stock of seabream is caught as by-catch by trawlers targeting sardinella? And then we are asked to sustainably manage this resource. How is that possible when so much is taken as by catch?

With respect to the financial compensation, for us, the most important thing is not whether we have 1 million, or 10 millions, or 100 millions euros. It is that the money should be well spent, transparently, to promote development.

Transparency in the fisheries sector, both regarding the use of the funds designated for the sector and the licensing conditions, is a crucial issue. In this regard, we have supported the integration of our fisheries in the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI), which is being implemented by the Ministry of Fisheries and Maritime economy.

Regarding the use of the financial contribution from the fisheries agreement, we, fishermen, regret that we have up to now seen nothing done by the EU in terms of investing in infrastructure or in technology transfer: ports, processing plants for our products, storage warehouses, training programs, etc.

Such investments are important if we want to develop a true 'win-win' partnership, which we hope to be able to do under this new Protocol. We hope you will support it.

Thank you