

1. The 4th meeting of the India-Sri Lanka Joint Working Group on Fisheries was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 13-14 January 2012. The Sri Lankan delegation was led by Ms. Kshenuka Senewiratne, Additional Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs of Sri Lanka and the Indian delegation by Mr. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs of India. Both sides reviewed the developments since the last meeting of the Joint Working Group which was held on 28-29 March 2011 in New Delhi, India.

2. The two sides noted that the Joint Working Group process on fisheries had a salutary effect. It was acknowledged that the Joint Statement on Fishing Arrangements of 26th October 2008 had since led to a decrease in violent incidents. Both sides reiterated the highest priority accorded by their respective Governments to the well being, safety and security of fishermen from the two countries. Both countries agreed that the use of force could not be justified under any circumstances, and reiterated in this regard the importance of extending humane treatment to all fishermen. Acknowledging that fisheries involved the socio-economic and livelihood dimensions of the fishermen living in coastal areas in India and Sri Lanka, the two sides agreed to enhance cooperation that would allow both countries to pursue their fishing activity in a safe, secure and sustainable manner, including discouraging fishermen from using destructive fishing methods. They also discussed measures for the expeditious release of bonafide fishermen from both countries. The need to respect the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) was stressed by the Sri Lankan side.

3. Both sides noted the importance of an ongoing engagement between fishermen and fishermen's associations in India and Sri Lanka. They agreed to encourage a continued dialogue process between the fishermen's communities of the two countries through regular meetings. In this context, it was agreed that a delegation of fishermen's representatives from Sri Lanka would visit India at the earliest in 2012.

4. Both sides exchanged views on various measures to manage the fishery resources in their respective waters. Emphasizing the need for conservation of marine resources and protection of marine ecology, they agreed to the joint development of fisheries and marine resources in the Palk Bay area and the Gulf of Mannar. The two sides agreed to develop programmes for bilateral exchanges in aquaculture and fishing related activities, including training in fisheries management, genetic improvement of cultured species, fishing technology, exchange of scientists, etc.

5. The two sides held discussions on a Memorandum of Understanding on Development and Cooperation in the field of Fisheries and agreed to work towards concluding the same at an early date.

6. The Indian delegation thanked the Government of Sri Lanka for its assistance in rescuing Indian fishermen stranded due to cyclonic weather conditions in the Palk Straits area in recent weeks, enabling their speedy repatriation and facilitating the visit of a team from India to salvage the grounded boats. The Indian delegation thanked the Sri Lankan authorities for continuing to facilitate the visit of Indian fishermen and pilgrims to Kachchativu for the festival of St. Anthony.

7. It was agreed that meetings of the Joint Working Group would be held on a regular basis, at least once in six months. The next meeting would be held in New Delhi at mutually convenient dates.

Colombo