

OPENING SPEECH BY ICCAT CHAIR

Honourable Ministers; Madam secretary of state for Fisheries; the Wali of the Marrakesch area; Dignitaries; Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my great honour to welcome you all to the 25th Regular meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas and to express our sincere appreciation to the Royal Kingdom of Morocco for offering to host us once again in this beautiful and historic City of Marrakech.

To the Wali of the Marrakesch area, we thank you very much for allowing us to hold this meeting in your beautiful city and the protection you have provided to us.

This is the third ICCAT Meeting to be held in Marrakech, and the fourth in Morocco. This proves Morocco's long standing commitment to ICCAT.

Morocco has been a Contracting Party to the ICCAT Convention since 1969, making it one of the first ten Parties to express its commitment to be bound by the ICCAT Convention. It is, therefore, most appropriate that this 25th Regular Meeting of the Commission should be held in Morocco.

Morocco has also been instrumental in supporting the governance of ICCAT in many ways. In this respect, it is appropriate to mention the names of a few Moroccans, who have served our organization.

First, and foremost, I would like to acknowledge Mr. DAHMAN LAAYACHI, the former Director General in charge of fisheries, at a time when Morocco did not have a ministry of fisheries. Mr. Laayachi, whom some of you will remember very well, represented Morocco at ICCAT in the early 1970s and played a prominent role during the formative years of ICCAT. Sadly, Mr. Laayachi passed away a few years ago.

The second person I would like to acknowledge is Mr. ABDELLAH SROUR, the current Executive Secretary of GFCM, who served as the First Vice Chair of ICCAT from 1999 to 2005.

Third, I acknowledge Ms. ZAKIA DRIOUICH, the current Secretary General of the Ministry of Fisheries, who served as the First Vice Chair of ICCAT from 2009 to 2011.

And more recently, Mr. TAOUFIK el KTIRI served as the Chair of PWG from 2011 to 2015.

And, of course, Mr. DRISS MESKI, our current Executive Secretary for the past 14 years.

Morocco, has not only supported the governance of ICCAT, but has also played a vital role in promoting the active participation of African Atlantic coast countries in ICCAT through ATLAFCO, or COMHAFAT. In recent years, COMHAFAT has become a very important organization to unify the voices of African Atlantic coast members in ICCAT.

Morocco's annual financial contribution to ICCAT is 32,000 Euros.

Marrakech

Now a little bit about the beautiful city which we are in. ICAAT's first meeting in Marrakech took place in November 2000 and the second in 2008.

Marrakech, also called the Red City because of its red sandstone buildings, was founded in 1062 by the Berber dynasty.

It quickly grew to become the most important cultural, religious and commercial center in Morocco and, eventually becoming the capital of Morocco in the 16th century.

In the 1990s Marrakech was made internationally popular by Crosby, Stills and Nash in their rock hit song: MARRAKESCH Express. The rock fans among us will recall that Graham Nash was a member of the English rock band, the Hollies. Additionally, there was the 1989 Academy award winning movie; The Marrakesch Express, directed by the Italian movie maker, Gabriele Salvatores.

These days, Marrakech is a major tourist destination, with 2 million visitors per year expected by 2020. The motoring enthusiasts among us will be interested to know that the main streets of Marrakech also host the world famous touring car formula 2 race.

And it is in this splendid venue, the MovenpickHotel, where the Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization was signed in early 1994.

Traditionally, ICCAT Meetings are held in locations close to the ocean with some connection to ICCAT. And here we are, several hours away from the closest beach, sitting on the edge of the Sahara Desert.

Yet, Marrakech boasts the largest fish market in Africa. If you struggle to believe me, check it out for yourselves. I understand that the market extends over an area of 3 hectares, and if you are lucky enough, you may see some ICCAT species on sale.

Marrakech is definitely an ideal place from which to experience the wonders and diversity of Morocco and I hope you will have sufficient time at the meeting to explore the wonders of this grand city.

There cannot be a better place other than Marrakech to extend our thanks to Morocco and to Mr. Driss Meski, our Executive Secretary, who has dedicated so much effort over the past 14 years to our organization. Driss is a true son of the Berber soil in every respect. His ancestral home which is not very far from where we are, nestles in the foothills of the Sahara Desert. It is fitting that we should have this meeting on his home soil and in his region.

Driss, I wish to express ICCAT's sincere appreciation to you. You have left big shoes for ICCAT which will be very difficult to fill. You have made Morocco proud and you have made Africa proud. Thank you very much.

When you elected me as your Chair about two years ago, I was full of optimism and hope that ICCAT would successfully meet its goals as one of the leading tuna management organizations in the world through my leadership that champions transparency and promotes the special interests of developing states and the active participation by industry and non-governmental organizations in decisions that affect the management of the resources in the ICCAT Convention area. Members are well aware of my personal health challenges shortly after my election. I would like to thank you all for your understanding, support and good wishes to me over the last years.

I would especially like to express my sincere appreciation to Mr. Stefaan Depypere, First Vice Chair and Mr. Raul Delgado, Second Vice Chair for their support. I would also like to thank Mr. Driss Meski and the ICCAT Secretariat for their support. And most importantly, I would like to thank all of you for your continuing prayers, support and communications with me. Hardly a day went by without communication from one of you, checking on my health and to encourage me to persevere as Chair of the Commission. Although my health has significantly improved. In the interest of the Commission, it will be my pleasure to hand over the leadership of this Commission to another Chair of the Commission at the end of this meeting. Let me assure you of my continuing enthusiasm to advocate for the sustainable and responsible management of the fisheries resources within the ICCAT Convention area in my work.

Once again this meeting brings us many challenges. In my Circular to you, I highlighted key issues I consider critical to be resolved at this meeting. These are issues I intend to get resolved at this meeting. These issues will require bold decisions which I am hopeful, you are all ready to take.

- The first priority issue on my list relates to amendments to the ICCAT Convention to bring our convention in line with 21st century international fisheries management standards and norms. The international community expects us to complete this process, and we cannot fail.

We have spent almost three years on this process. Our forebearers took no more than three years to negotiate the original ICCAT Convention. This was a remarkable achievement at a time given that they did not have the luxuries of modern communication tools we now enjoy in the form of internet, Skype, or track change facilities to documents. At this meeting, it is my wish that we can bring the Convention amendment process to a close. In this context, would like to formally acknowledge and thank, the Chair of the Working Group on Convention Amendment, Ms. Deirdre Warner-Kramer for her hard work in steering us through complex issues.

- The Commission would also need to consider other important issues. They include revision of the management plan for eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean bluefin tuna, and possible measures to enhance the management of Atlantic swordfish, Mediterranean albacore as well as any other species which the SCRS will bring to our attention as requiring special attention. It is my firm belief that measures on a stock-by-stock basis are insufficient unless they are backed by an effective MCS package and a good compliance process. I count on the PWG and the Compliance Committee to provide us with the needed direction on relevant issues.
- I would like to urge all Panels to review with great attention the recommendations emanating from the Second ICCAT Performance Review, in order to strive for excellence within our Commission. The follow up Inter-sessional Working Group Meeting has already assigned the recommendations to be reviewed by each body. We must ensure that this important work is not overlooked in the many other tasks we have ahead of us this week.

Finally, this year brings us additional tasks of choosing the next Executive Secretary and the next Chair of the Commission and the Chairs of our working groups and Panels. These positions play key roles in the functioning of our organization so we should all take the process very seriously.

In particular, the process of selecting a new Executive Secretary will be challenging to all of us. We have not gone through such a process for some 14 years. The last time we did so was in 2003 when we elected our current Executive Secretary.

I am confident that the ICCAT Contracting Parties will be ready to meet all of the challenges ahead of us. Like Morocco, all the ICCAT family now realizes the importance of good fisheries management based on scientific knowledge and advice, and the increasing importance of the role that the international community plays in the sustainable use of marine living resources.

At this meeting, international attention will once again focus on our organization, as this is an important year for bluefin tuna.

As you are well aware, the international image of ICCAT is defined by how well we manage bluefin tuna. Consequently, decisive action on bluefin tuna at this meeting is something that should concern us all, even if we are not actively involved in the bluefin tuna fishery. We cannot afford to be described again as an international failure and shame as was the case previously.

I thank you all once again for your good wishes, and reiterate my gratitude to the Government of Morocco for hosting this meeting and to the Executive Secretary for its organisation.

In accordance with Rule 7 of the Rules of Procedure of ICCAT, I hereby declare the 25th Regular Meeting of the Commission duly open.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bouaida, Secretary of State for Fisheries and to formally invite her to address the meeting.