

STATEMENT

UN Ocean's Conference



International
Labour Office

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STATEMENT BY

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Partnership Dialogue 4 - Making Fisheries Sustainable

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

The ocean is not only critical to the wellbeing of the planet, it also is a workplace; an important source of employment. Over 350 million people depend on the ocean for their livelihood, either in tourism, shipping or fishing. 38 million workers around the world are engaged in capture fishing.

Fishing as an occupation involves special challenges: the hazardous nature of the marine environment, challenging conditions of work and the unique employment relationships stemming from the tradition of paying fishers based on the share of the catch. Fishing vessels may spend months, even years at sea, making it difficult to control living and working conditions of crews.

A lack of clear laws and effective implementation and enforcement of them can lead to exploitation. A visible example is the persistent problem of forced labour and trafficking of fishers. Yes, deep into the 21st century, there is still slavery at sea.

Violations of fundamental principles and rights at work are not only detrimental to the fishers involved: they also damage the reputations of whole fisheries and undermine those competing legally and fairly.

The fight against illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing and fisheries crime should go hand in hand with the fight against exploitation of fishers. To do so, a legal framework for protecting living and working conditions of fishers must be in place and enforced.

The ILO has international labour standards aimed to improve the conditions of fishers. These include the ILO standards on fundamental principles and rights at work, the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29), and the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188). The ILO calls upon all States to ratify and implement these instruments.

Coordinated action by all concerned and at all levels is critical. Ministries responsible for labour, fisheries, maritime safety and other issues should work together with representatives of both fishing vessel owners and fishers. It will stimulate innovative thinking, and build links between SDG 14, SDG 8 and other SDGs, and thus truly lead to sustainable fisheries.

The ocean is a workplace and fishers like all other workers have the right to decent work.

Thank you.