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National Industry Dialogue for Responsible and Sustainable Supply Chains in the Philippines

► By Mr Khalid Hassan, Director, ILO Country Office for the Philippines,
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- Honourable Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma and officials from DOLE;
- Honourable Secretary Francisco Tiu-Laurel and colleagues from DA and BFAR;
- His Excellency Ambassador Endo Kazuya of Japan;
- His Excellency Ambassador Nader Zaki of Egypt;
- UN Resident Coordinator Arnaud Peral,
- FAO Representative Lionel Dabbadie, UN colleagues;
- Representatives from government, employers, and workers' organizations;
- Excellencies, development partners, ladies and gentlemen —
Magandang umaga.

It is a great honour to welcome you to this *first National Industry Dialogue on Sustainable Aquaculture Supply Chains in the Philippines*.

Today, we are taking a decisive step forward — from discussion to action — to position aquaculture as a cornerstone of sustainable growth, decent work, and responsible trade.

Aquaculture: A Driver of Growth and Inclusion

Aquaculture is one of the fastest-growing agri-food sectors in the world, providing direct employment to over 20 million people and supporting millions more across the value chain.

In the Philippines, it anchors rural livelihoods, enhances food security, and contributes to exports and enterprise development. [pause]

Products such as shrimp, seaweed, crab, and tilapia are not merely commodities — they are *pathways to jobs and opportunity* for thousands of families in coastal and inland communities.

Yet this potential remains under-realized. Informality, weak compliance systems, and limited access to social protection persist.

Many small producers face barriers to global markets due to a lack of traceability and due diligence mechanisms.

Women workers remain concentrated in low-paid processing roles, and the sector needs greater investment in skills, productivity, and safety.

Evidence and Partnerships for Change

Through the *Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Supply Chains (RISSC)* Project, supported and funded by the Government of Japan, the ILO conducted a flagship study on the labour and business realities of the shrimp and seaweed supply chains.

This work provided the first comprehensive roadmap for sector-wide improvement — integrating labour standards, enterprise upgrading, and social protection.

Working closely with DOLE and DA, we supported the establishment of the first Aquaculture Industry Tripartite Council (ITC) in Region 12 — a pioneering platform for social dialogue and joint action.

The Council has developed a ten-year industry plan, initiated joint DOLE–DA compliance visits (under SCPs), and begun building a Labour Market Profile for the sector — a model that can be scaled up nationally.

These are concrete steps toward formalisation, productivity, and sustainability — exactly what the Trabaho Para sa Bayan (TBP) Act envisions: a whole-of-society approach to generate quality jobs, improve competitiveness, and ensure no one is left behind.

Decent Work and Responsible Supply Chains

The future of aquaculture will depend not just on its economic growth — but on *the quality of that growth.*

The *ILO Technical Meeting on the Future of Work in Aquaculture* concluded that the sector must transition toward formal, inclusive, and sustainable employment, anchored in fundamental principles and rights at work — freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the elimination of forced and child labour, with equality of opportunity for all.

Forced labour, informality, and unsafe work are not only human rights violations — they are also economic risks.

Upholding decent work standards strengthens market access, boosts competitiveness, and builds resilience against shocks.

The new *ILO–FAO Policy Guidance on Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture* underscores that responsible business practices, social protection, and skills development are central to achieving sustainability in this “blue economy” sector.

From Global Commitments to Local Action

This Dialogue builds on the Philippines’ role as a *Pathfinder Country* for the UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions and as a member of the Global Coalition for Social Justice.

We deeply appreciate the steadfast leadership of Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma, whose vision and commitment to advancing Decent Work and social justice have positioned the Philippines at the forefront of these global initiatives.

Under his guidance, the Department of Labor and Employment has championed inclusive policies, strong tripartite engagement, and partnerships that align national priorities with the ILO’s mandate for fair, sustainable, and rights-based development.

These efforts connect directly with the Labour and Employment Plan (PLEP) and the TBP Act, ensuring that aquaculture development contributes to job-rich, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable growth.

A Call to Collective Action

The way forward is clear:

Government must strengthen regulation, social protection, and data systems;

Employers and industry leaders must adopt human-rights-based due diligence and invest in skills and safety;

Workers’ organizations must amplify voices from the ponds, processing plants, and coastal communities;

And development partners must align support behind a shared vision of a responsible, competitive aquaculture industry.

Conclusion

The Philippines is well-positioned to lead the region in building a responsible and resilient aquaculture sector — one that feeds the nation, sustains livelihoods, and upholds dignity in work.

Let us make this Dialogue the start of a *national compact* — where productivity goes hand in hand with protection, and where growth is measured not only in tons of fish, but in the quality of jobs created and lives improved.

Mabuhay, and maraming salamat po.