



International  
Labour  
Office

## **WORLD FISHERIES DAY**

### **The violation of human rights within the fishing sector and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing**

*Sheikh Zayed Centre, FAO headquarters  
Rome, 21 November 2016*

### **ILO STATEMENT<sup>1</sup>**

Director-General GRAZIANO DA SILVA,

Cardinal PAROLIN,

Cardinal VEGLIÒ,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Thank you very much for having invited the ILO to participate in this important event on the World Fisheries Day.

Through the concept of decent work, the ILO has committed to helping all women and men in the world of work – including those working in fisheries, to pursue their material wellbeing and aspirations in conditions of freedom, dignity, economic security and equal opportunities.

The goal is not just the creation of jobs but of quality jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> Statement delivered by Mr Gianni Rosas, Director of ILO Office for Italy and San Marino.

The fishing sector makes a crucial contribution to global food security, human welfare and economic prosperity, and is particularly important to coastal communities in many developing States.

It is estimated this sector provides direct work to more than 50 million workers, which become nearly 200 million if we consider the number of workers engaged in the entire supply chain.

Most fishing operations provide acceptable, often good, conditions for fishers. Some operators and recruitment agencies are, however, engaged in practices that are abusive and quite often fall into the categories of forced labour and trafficking. These practices, not only violate the fundamental principles and rights at work of fishers, but also damage the reputation of the sector and undermine those competing through legal, fair and morally acceptable means.

An ILO report published in 2013 found that migrant workers in particular are too often deceived and forced by brokers and recruitment agencies to work on board vessels under the threat of force or by means of debt bondage.<sup>2</sup> Victims describe illness, physical injury, psychological and sexual abuse, death, and their vulnerability on board vessels in remote locations of the sea for months and years at a time. Fishers are forced to work for long hours at very low pay, and the work is intense, hazardous and difficult. Capture fisheries have amongst the highest occupational fatality rates in the world.

There is growing collective awareness of the urgent need to prevent and combat forced labour and human trafficking in the fishing sector. People do not want to buy fish that has been caught in a manner that damages the environment. They do not want to put on their plates fish that originates from labour exploitation, or, at its worst, is the product of criminal activities and extreme forms of human rights abuse, including forced labour and human trafficking.

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<sup>2</sup> ILO, *Caught at sea: Forced labour and trafficking in fisheries*, Geneva, 2013 accessible at [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms\\_214472.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_214472.pdf)

Fishing vessel owners, trade unions, NGOs, the Church and other faith-based organizations, the press and many others are actively engaged in the fight against forced labour and promotion of human rights for fishers.

Efforts have been stepped up at international level to develop institutional and legal frameworks for the elimination of forced labour and human trafficking, and for the improvement of fishers' safety and working conditions.

Recognizing that the forms of forced labour and trafficking had changed, the ILO Conference adopted in 2014 a Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29) of 1930. According to the Protocol - that entered into force 12 days ago, **ratifying States shall take effective measures to prevent and eliminate forced labour, provide protection and access to remedies to victims, and sanction the perpetrators.**<sup>3</sup> **They shall develop a national policy and plan of action for the effective and sustained suppression of forced and compulsory labour.**

The elimination of child labour and forced labour are also a specific target of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Goal 8). Target 7 calls for States' action in terms of **effective measures to end forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour in all its forms, including the worst forms of child labour by 2030.**

Until recently, the fisheries sector lacked a holistic legal framework on conditions of work of fishers. **This gap was filled in 2007 with the adoption of the Work in Fishing Convention (No. 188), which provides a comprehensive set of labour standards for fishers. It covers issues such as medical care at sea, safety and health, food and accommodation, and rest time and sets out provisions for preventing abuses in the recruiting and placement of fishers. The Convention requires fishers to have a written contract, which is key to clarifying and protecting their rights.**

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<sup>3</sup> Two ILO Conventions on the elimination of forced labour were adopted in 1930 (No 29) and in 1957 (No 105). By ratifying these Conventions, member States undertake to suppress forced labour in all its forms. See <http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/introduction-to-international-labour-standards/conventions-and-recommendations/lang--en/index.htm>

I am happy to share with you good news: just a few days ago, this Convention received the minimum number of ratifications to enter into force next year.

The ratification and implementation of ILO instruments is now critical as they can bring human and labour rights directly to fishers. We also need to create better mechanisms to share information and good practice. In parallel, it is a collective task to find synergies and ensure implementation and compliance at country and local levels.

A global alliance has just been established in order to achieve the ambition of eradicating forced and child labour by 2030. The Alliance 8.7 aims to coordinate action, pull expertise and leverage resources on forced and child labour among different actors and across diverse fields.<sup>4</sup>

In the area of fisheries and together with the FAO, IMO and other partners, the ILO implements a global action programme against forced labour and trafficking of fishers at sea.<sup>5</sup>

In all these and other endeavours, we do look forward to working together with the FAO, the Holy See and other partners to support coherent action by national institutions, the social partners and other actors with a view to making decent work in the fishing sector a reality.

Thank you.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.alliance87.org/>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms\\_429359.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_429359.pdf)