

Europêche promotes social dialogue, health and safety in Southeast Asia

Brussels, 25 November 2022

'A fisher's life, a fisher's future' has been the motto of the international conference organised by the Fishing Industry Safety and Health (FISH) Platform last week in Thailand. The FISH Platform is a world leading group of experts involved in safety and health in the fishing industry. Globally, most commercial fishers are located in the Southeast Asian region, characterised by a low level of ratification of international conventions aimed at protecting fishers' health, safety and working conditions. The Platform considered it about time for public authorities, experts, employers and workers to come together to share experiences in the implementation of such conventions, social dialogue, and to jointly push for the sustainable management of the fishing industry. Europêche has joined the call.

After a warm welcome by the Marine Department of the Thai Ministry of Transport and Cadets of the Asian Maritime Technological College, during two full days, specialist from all over the world¹ gathered to tackle one endemic problem in the fishing industry: Safety. 100.000 Fishing-related deaths occur each year², the vast majority happening in Asia and Africa, particularly in inland and coastal fisheries. In other words, every 5 minutes, a fisherman or woman passes away. According to Europêche, it is regrettable that international instruments aimed at protecting the life of 35 million people working in the fishing sector have not been widely ratified.

One of the main goals of this conference was to engage with stakeholders in Asia in the work of advocating human and labour rights for fishers and to support the development of pathways to ensure workers' protection. By way of example, in the Thai fishing industry, on average 60% of fishermen working on their vessels originally come from neighbour countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos. As in the EU, Thailand is dealing with a lack of motivation among the new generation to join the industry. A challenge for Thailand remains the ratification of key conventions for the safety of fishing vessels (Torremolinos Convention) and for training and certification (STCW-F). However, the country was the first in Asia to ratify the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (C188) aimed at protecting the living and working conditions of fishers on board of vessels.

At the conference, Rosalie Tukker, Senior Policy Advisor of Europêche, spoke about the importance of social dialogue and its ability to together with the workers address the gaps in the social dimension of fisheries and lead international effort to improve safety and working conditions, making key stakeholders aware of the human side of the sector, which is often forgotten.

Ms Tukker, declared: *"Fishing is significantly safer in Europe, but it remains a global concern particularly in developing countries. For Europêche it is an absolute priority to protect the lives of those working at sea. Fishing stands at the beginning of an international seafood supply chain. Seafood remains one of the most traded commodities in the world and that concerns the EU market. We strive*

¹ Experts from the UN specialised agency International Labour Organization (ILO), the Japan Agency for Maritime Education and Training for Seafarers, Stella Maris, the UN specialised agency International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Nautical Institute, Novikontas SCM, the Seafarers' Charity, the Institute for Marine Science and Fishing Technology in Vietnam, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), the International Ocean Institute in Singapore, the Outlaw Ocean Project, and Europêche.

² FISH Safety Foundation, Fisher Mortality Brief, November 2022 (Commissioned by The Pew Charitable Trusts) via <https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2022/11/fisher-mortality-brief.pdf>.

to make sure that fish products are harvested with high standards of safety and due respect to human and labour rights”.

Europêche, under the leadership of the FISH Platform will continue to provide a stage for all who wish to improve fishers’ lives and aims on working more closely in the future with Asian countries towards that goal.

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