

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
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BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 181121g

Wednesday 21.11.2018

World Fisheries Day 2018 (21 November)

Message for World Fisheries Day 2018

Intervention of Msgr. Paul R. Gallagher

Concluding Address of Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano

On the occasion of World Fisheries Day 2018, held today, 21 November, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the Mission of the Holy See Permanent Observer and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development-Section of the Apostleship of the Sea have organized, at the seat of the FAO in Rome, a meeting on the theme *Labour rights are human rights: working together to ensure the rights of fishers - fighting trafficking and forced labour in the fishing sector*.

During the meeting, His Eminence Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, presented the Holy See Message for World Fisheries Day 2018. H.E. Msgr. Paul R. Gallagher, secretary for Relations with States, gave a speech, and Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano, Holy See Permanent Observer at the FAO, the IFAD and the WFP, gave the concluding address.

The following is the Message and the interventions pronounced during the meeting:

Message for World Fisheries Day 2018

World Fisheries Day was established in New Delhi, India, on 21 November 1997 when for the first time representatives of small-scale, artisanal fishers and fish workers from 32 countries gathered together to form an international fishers' organization and committed themselves to support global sustainable fishing policies,

practices and social justice.

To appreciate the importance of celebrating World Fisheries Day, it is enough to consider the FAO 2016 data indicating that 59.6 million people were engaged (on a full-time, part-time or occasional basis) in fisheries and aquaculture. Of these workers nearly 14% were women. The great majority of the population engaged in these sectors were in Asia (85%), followed by Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. These together supply about 171 million tonnes of fish to the global market, and generate a first-sale value of production estimated at USD 320 billion. Global fish value chains that include production, processing, distribution and trade of fish, provide for the livelihoods of around 820 million people. Fish consumption provides about 3.2 billion people with nearly 20 percent of their animal protein.

Hidden within these significant figures which reveal the importance and contributions of the fishing sectors to food security, economic growth and poverty alleviation, there are countless and persistent challenging issues. Topping the list, aside from physical and verbal abuse, is the massive exploitation of fishers, including numerous cases of forced labor, human trafficking and disappearance at sea. We see direct links between all these abuses and the use of flags of convenience, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, and transnational crime. Besides, we should not forget the challenge of sustaining fish stocks, pollution and other environmental concerns.

From this distressing and painful reality, the fishery workers are crying out for help; and, as Church, we cannot shut our ears and we cannot remain silent.

On the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): we would like to reaffirm Article 4 of the Declaration: "*No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms*". Additionally, we wish to recall Article 23, as follows:

1. *Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.*
2. *Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.*
3. *Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.*
4. *Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.*

These fundamental labour rights are human rights, and they must be fishers' rights too!

Aware of the many problematic issues in fisheries, Member Countries of the specialized agencies of the United Nations[1] have adopted and endorsed several international instruments that, if ratified and fully implemented by all States, could dramatically change the life of fishing workers, of their families and the environmental status of fisheries resources.

The fishing industry, which is considered by many as the main culprit for the difficult working and living conditions of fishers, is committed to solve these problems with product certification, while civil society and consumers are calling the retailers to be more responsible in their business and to exercise due diligence throughout their whole supply chain.

However, from reading the mass media reports on the issue and, most of all from hearing the harrowing stories recounted by the chaplains and volunteers of the Apostleship of the Sea around the world, it seems that all these efforts are not enough, because the number of governments that have ratified the international instruments is still very low and in some small areas, the fishing industry still suffers from the ruthlessness of profit-seeking

policy makers.

As a Church, we would like to recall the exhortation of Pope Francis to put people before the profit, as follows: “*Behind every activity there is a human being. [...] The current centrality of financial activity compared to the real economy is not random: behind this there is the choice of someone who thinks, wrongly, that money is made with money. Money, real money, is made with work. It is work that gives dignity to man, not money*” [2].

As we celebrate World Fisheries Day, and as we expect to increase awareness on the situation of fish workers and create fundamental changes in their lives, we would like to call on international agencies, to join hands, putting aside differences, antagonism and rivalry, to develop a roadmap towards widespread ratification and implementation of the international instruments. This cooperation should be pursued at global, regional, national and local levels; and it should ensure the involvement of civil society, industry and retailers, NGOs, trade unions and the Church.

Working together, we can stop human trafficking and forced labour at sea, we can improve the safety of working conditions, and fight IUU fishing, in the hope of creating a socially, environmentally and commercially sustainable fisheries sector.

It is a great challenge but it is also the only hope that we have to reaffirm “*the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms*” [3] in the global fisheries industry.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
Prefect

[1] International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Labour Office (ILO) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

[2] <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2018-09-07/intervista-papa-francesco-i-soldi-non-si-fanno-con-i-soldi-ma-con-il-lavoro-114036.shtml?uuid=AEf2V5IF>

[3] Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Preamble.

Intervention of H.E. Msgr. Paul R. Gallagher

Mr. Director General,
Excellencies,

I am grateful for the invitation to participate in this Special event on the theme of *Labour rights are human rights: working together to ensure the rights of fishers - fighting trafficking and forced labour in the fishing sector*. Allow me to begin by expressing my gratitude to the FAO, the Dicastery for promoting Integral Human Development and the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the FAO for providing us with the opportunity, on the occasion of World Fisheries Day, to focus our reflection on the importance of respect for fundamental human rights in this sector.

The legal framework of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides an important point of reference in efforts to promote social development and improve governance for fisheries in developing countries. While the fisheries sector in some countries lacks a systematic and sustained monitoring effort to track fundamental human rights concerns, which include, among other issues, forced evictions, detention without trial, child labour, forced labour and unsafe working conditions, as well as violence and personal security, these issues are by no means unique to fisheries. Fundamental human rights concerns affecting fishing communities are in many cases underappreciated and demand a more comprehensive monitoring and response.

The Holy See has always looked with particular attention to the reality of fishers, seafarers and their families. A clear indication of this involvement is the Apostolate of the Sea that has been active for more than a century, and in particular since 1957, when it was formally given its actual name. This initiative works for the pastoral, social, and material welfare of all seafarers and fishermen regardless of colour, race or creed.[1]

In line with this tradition, today I would like to speak about fisheries, sustainable development, the dignity of work, and how it is not possible to guarantee dignified work without also ensuring respect of fundamental human rights.

One year ago, as recalled by the ILO Deputy Director General Mr. Moussa Oumarou, the ILO Work in Fishing Convention came into force, 10 years after its adoption. This was good news for more than 58 million people that are engaged in the sector. As the ILO data reported, approximately 37 percent of them are engaged full time, 23 percent part time, and the remainder are either occasional fishers or of unspecified status. Over 15 million are working full-time on board fishing vessels.[2] In 2016, the total fish production reached an all-time high of 171 million tonnes, of which 88 percent was utilized for direct human consumption that resulted in a record-high per capita annual consumption of 20.3 kg.[3] Such data clearly indicate that this sector is of fundamental importance not only for its economical impact but, even more, in providing food for millions of people and the sustainability for thousands of coastal communities, in particular in the developing world. The goal of the Work in Fishing Convention is to prevent unacceptable forms of work for fishers all over the world, with a special focus on migrant fishers. While commending this important document, we are here today because a lot of work remains to be done to ensure that every employee in the fishing industry can enjoy the full respect of their human dignity.

In the last decades, globalisation has witnessed the onset of more competition, inadequate wages and often harsh conditions for workers in this sector. In many countries, labour protections often remain inadequate or unenforced, exploitation is common as well as child-labour and human trafficking. Unfortunately, fishery is one of the sectors in which we can see the most degrading and inhuman work conditions that are almost always followed by further negative repercussions, such as ongoing poverty and the absence of due respect for human dignity. We should not forget, furthermore, that the thousands of people involved in the commercial sea routes, which account for 90% of the merchandise transported globally, are often forced to spend weeks far from their families and communities in almost complete isolation. All of these situations that we are speaking about affect entire communities and, disproportionately, the most vulnerable and the poor, fostering marginalisation and exclusion.

Moreover, in the attempt to tackle these problems, we face cross-cutting issues that link together not only labour exploitation, child-labour and human trafficking, but even climate change and food security. In fact, the sustainability of the environment is at risk due to the excessive exploitation of maritime resources and illegal or unregulated fishing practices. If not properly addressed, these practices may jeopardize the food security of many countries, bringing economical damages and environmental problems, as well as harming the future of the next generations.

The Holy See, indeed, supports the approach presented in the most recent report of the FAO on “The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2018” that affirms how “fisheries are not just seen as resources; they are also viewed as sources of livelihoods (e.g. income, food, employment), sites of expression of cultural values, and a buffer against shocks for poor communities.[4] Indeed, to tackle cross-cutting issues, the focus should be on sustainability and accountability, and international organizations should play a pivotal role in this regard. The international community should push for a more comprehensive and resolute approach, taking into account that, too often, small-scale fishers are left behind, because development policies have failed to address the structural uncertainties linked with their situation.

Since many of the problems of this sector are so firmly rooted, it is difficult to imagine how the action of any one international organisation, NGO or even government could solve them on their own. What is needed is the cooperation of all of these actors, so as to obtain effective and concrete results that will allow for change in the lives of millions of poor and marginalised fishermen. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which celebrates its seventieth anniversary on December 10th, represents that kind of “shared” approach, based upon

the fundamental cornerstone of the entire human rights framework that we should try to preserve, implement and replicate.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights is the first and most important document from which began the international juridical discussion on human freedom and dignity. Unfortunately, the consensus that allowed the ratification of that document has weakened and the human rights framework is now facing new challenges and a growing lack of legitimacy all over the world.

Recognizing the legal framework already in place, we may identify three possible areas of action for facilitating a human rights-based approach in reforming the fisheries sector: (a) strengthening the capacity of this framework, to raise awareness of it, and to respond to specific incidents of fundamental human rights abuse; (b) applying a human rights-based approach to address the roots of vulnerability and exclusion in fishing-dependent communities; and (c) supporting fundamental human rights advocacy as a driver in the reform of the fisheries sector. These priorities for action, if implemented together, may help reduce the incidence of rights violations in fishing communities and improve the recourse available when there are legitimate grievances. Pursuing these priorities necessarily means a shift in orientation—or an expansion of the realm of attention—for many initiatives aimed at reforming the fisheries sector. Fundamental human rights advocacy can help create the conditions for small-scale fishing communities to have a voice in decisions regarding the allocation of resource rights, as well as to argue for social justice more broadly. Only then can we reasonably expect local fishing communities to commitment themselves to building sustainable resource management over the long term. Regional economic and political groupings (such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, African Union, and the European Union), UN agencies, and other international institutions can exert different forms of pressure on States to act in accordance with international treaties on human rights. They can also incorporate fundamental human rights principles in global codes of conduct and regional agreements, as the European Union has done recently in its new fishing agreements with developing countries. Fishery sector organizations, from state agencies to producer and community organizations, can also play a critical role as proponents of reform, as monitors of progress, and as advocates of best practices to share with others. To remain grounded in local priorities, however, all such efforts need to recognize and reinforce the efforts of those whose rights are at risk.

In conclusion, we need to collaborate today more than ever before. We should propose a broader and more inclusive approach to the issues related to fisheries, aware of the suffering of so many brothers and sisters employed along the full length of the supply chain.

In this seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we should take the consensus that allowed the approval of this fundamental document as an example of overcoming a strictly economic approach, so as to emphasise the right to decent and safe work for everyone.

The Holy See strongly supports the efforts of the international community to put an end to the abuse and criminal practices still present in the fishery sector, it commends the work done by the FAO and assures its cooperation, as much as possible, through the involvement of Catholic institutions.

Thank you for your kind attention.

[1] <http://www.apostolatusmaris.org/about/>

[2] [https://www.ilo.org/global/industries-and-sectors/shipping-ports-fisheries-inland-waterways/fisheries/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/industries-and-sectors/shipping-ports-fisheries-inland-waterways/fisheries/lang-en/index.htm)

[3] <http://www.fao.org/3/i9540en/I9540EN.pdf>

[4] <http://www.fao.org/3/i9540en/I9540EN.pdf>

Concluding Address of Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano

Mr. Director General of the FAO,
Señor Vice-Director General of the ILO,
Eminence,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentleman,
All friends:

I would like to conclude this meeting with some brief reflections. This morning we focused our attention on the issue of trafficking in persons and forced labour in the fisheries sector, and we have focused in particular on the legal dimension of this problem, declaring that these practices constitute a violation of the human rights of fishermen.

Will we remain indifferent to this drama, especially this year in which the 70th Anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is celebrated? We can not be satisfied with ascertaining data, referring to statistics, enumerating desires or pointing out injustices. I am sure that our meeting will serve as a stimulus to promote effective actions and undertake a joint effort to put an end to such painful phenomena as those referred to here. These can not be reduced to mere and fleeting headlines. They are tragedies that are lived by helpless and defenceless people. Before them, no one can look the other way, avoiding them, insinuating that it is a distant and faraway problem. Nobody can consider themselves excluded from involvement in the fight against a scourge that should be removed as soon as possible. It is worthwhile to sustain this noble cause. Because there is certainly the risk of limiting ourselves to remembering principles, affirming intentions, highlighting strident outrages and formulating denunciations. On the other hand, in order to give real weight to the words we have spoken today, it is essential to have a more vivid awareness of the misfortunes that these people live, to make their pain our own, to place ourselves in their painful situation and, with responsibility and steadfast will, initiate action and vigorous measures to relieve from their prostration those who suffer most [1]. All of us, public and private bodies, state and regional entities, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector, must be committed to setting aside rhetoric and platitudes, in order to give direction to incisive programs and decisions enabling dignity to be restored to those who have lost it in the fishing sector.

In fact, work, which is an activity through which the dignity of human persons is expressed and enhanced,[2] cannot and should not become something that, on the contrary, removes dignity. Work cannot and should not become a reality that forces human beings to live as prisoners in the “existential peripheries” from which it is difficult to leave. Work cannot and should not become an expression of that “throwaway” culture of which Pope Francis often speaks, and which transforms the most excluded and marginalized people into “leftovers”[3], that is, in human beings left behind, forgotten mercilessly, set aside and abandoned on countless occasions.

That is why the Holy See, again and again, raises its voice in defence of fishermen who are victims of human trafficking and forced labour. As it has just been shown in the Message for the World Fisheries Day 2018, it serves above all to reaffirm the principles contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a good road map that guides us in the safeguarding and protection of human dignity in the world of work, because there can not be any work that truly fulfils the person without respect for fundamental human rights.

For this reason it is necessary not only to know or study those international instruments that can defend workers when they see their most basic and fundamental rights harmed. It is not a simple matter of erudition. What is really needed today is their careful application, and this requires the will of the parties involved.

It is also essential to strengthen the role of all workers who are part of governmental and non-governmental organizations and who act on a daily basis as supporters of fishermen who are victims of cruel hardships. It is imperative to support all those who defend the workers, so that they may continue giving their best and committing themselves with all the means at their disposal to ensure the human rights of the latter are recognized and protected.

And it is also important to emphasize another aspect. This is linked with the growth of social responsibility of companies engaged in the fishing trade. In this regard, significant and truly positive steps have been taken, but further progress can be made. It is a challenge that is always present, considering also that situations that involve violations of the human rights of those working in this sector can be verified in all the phases of the value chain, especially in the course of activities associated with the capture, breeding and processing of fishery products. In this sense, it is essential to promote a business and financial culture that puts the human being and the quality of relationships between people at the centre, so that each company practices a form of social responsibility that is not merely marginal or occasional, but which inspires from within all its actions, orienting it socially”[4]. In short, as the illustrious speakers we have heard this morning have shown us so many times, time spent to improve the conditions of those who live in the fishing sector, with all the rich vitality of its components, will never be wasted. Certainly progress is perceived, but there is still a way to go to eliminate any phenomenon that may be counter to the human rights of fishermen. In this sense, it will be very useful to bear in mind that, in carrying out the activity of fishing, we must not forget that the natural resources of the planet are limited and that it is fundamental to preserve aquatic biodiversity, so that what is contained in the land and the sea can not be depleted or exhausted, due to unhealthy greed. It is a wealth that does not belong to us and that we must give back to those who have lent it to us, the generations that come after us. To these, we must not give back a set of problems, but rather a better, beautiful and harmonious world. And we will only be able to achieve this if we are aware that we are indebted to the poor, children and young people.

Therefore, sustainable and environmentally friendly fishing is not optional. It is instead a prerequisite for preserving the life and human rights of future generations. But all this will not happen without the help of all. It will have to be a synergy of projects, ideas, measures, efforts, conventions and commitments that will achieve such a desirable and just goal.

Ladies and gentlemen, I can not conclude without heartily thanking Professor José Graziano da Silva, Director General of FAO, for his courteous hospitality and his valuable collaboration in enabling this Conference. Thank you to all the officials of this honourable Organization, who with great professionalism have worked hard so we could be here today.

My cordial thanks go also to Mr. Moussa Oumarou, who represents the Director-General of the ILO and who has been kind enough to come from Geneva. With his words, he has demonstrated the importance that this Organization gives to this topic.

I especially thank the Cardinal Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for the presentation of the Holy See’s Message for World Fishing Day 2018, as well as to His Excellency Secretary for Relations with States of the Secretariat of State for the presence in this event and for the acute and accurate considerations with which he has shown us all here present.

My thanks, as well as my acknowledgment, go also to the other rapporteurs who have described the activity that they are carrying out in their respective Institutions. Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of you who have participated in this meeting for the attention and interest you have shown.

Thank you.

[1] Cf. Saint Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 48.

[2] Cf. Saint John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, n. 9.

[3] Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 53.

[4] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Oeconomicae et pecuniariae quaestiones*, no. 23.

