



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE  
**BOLLETTINO**

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**Holy See Intervention in the Sixth Edition of the International Congress on climate change and fishing organised by the Conxemar and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (Vigo, Spain, 3-5 October 2017)**

The following is this morning's intervention by the Holy See Permanent Observer at the FAO, Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano, at the Sixth Edition of the International Congress on climate change and fishing, held by the Conxemar and the FAO from 3 to 5 October in Vigo, Spain, on the theme: "Working towards ensuring decent work in fisheries and aquaculture".

**Intervention of Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano**

Ministers of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Environment,  
Madam Counsellor of Rural and Marine Affairs of the Junta de Galicia,  
Mr. Secretary General of Fisheries of the Government of Spain,  
Mr. Deputy Director-General, FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department,  
Mr President of Conxemar,  
Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives,  
Distinguished Representatives of Civil Society and Private Sector Organisations,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
All friends:

1. I am grateful to the Director-General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and the President of Conxemar for inviting me to participate in the "International Congress on Climate Change and Fisheries", also giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Holy See at this special session focusing on the theme of decent work in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

The international community pays particular attention to the notion of decent work. Often, however, this concept

is analysed only in its objective dimension, namely, with reference to the development and application of standards relating to safety, salary, health and other similar guarantees. However, talking about decent work means recognising above all the centrality and dignity of the human person. In fact, only by recognising human centrality and dignity is it possible to enact norms guiding decent work.

In the encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, Saint John Paul II indicated that work should be considered “good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man’s dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it. If one wishes to define more clearly the ethical meaning of work, it is this truth that one must particularly keep in mind. Work is a good thing for man – a good thing for his humanity – because through work man *not only transforms nature*, adapting it to his own needs, but he also *achieves fulfilment* as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more a human being’” (no. 9).

However, today the dignity and centrality of man, expressed through work, are often not recognised, or are violated, and many people are thus forced to live in “existential peripheries” which it is very difficult to leave. This is true in many economic and social sectors, but this is particularly true in certain areas of the fisheries sector, where serious violations of the human rights of fishermen have also been detected. In this regard, the Holy See has made its voice heard in defence of fishermen who, unfortunately, are victims of trafficking, trafficking and forced labour[1]. This theme was also the subject of a meeting held last November, at the FAO headquarters, on the occasion of the 2016 World Fisheries Day, attended by the Secretary of State of His Holiness, Cardinal Pietro Parolin.

2. We know that the fisheries and aquaculture sector is one of the most important areas at global level in terms of labour supply. Recent estimates show that fisheries and aquaculture globally provide work for some 57 million people, of whom 19 per cent are women, plus those working throughout the production chain, a total of almost 200 million workers[2]. Fisheries and aquaculture are therefore essential for the economic prosperity of many regions and particularly for coastal communities in many developing countries, where activities linked to artisanal fisheries are carried out by a number women, who constitute around 50% of the total workers employed in this field.

The role of this sector in terms of employment is even more relevant when taking into account the contribution of fisheries and aquaculture in food security and nutrition worldwide. In this regard, the FAO has noted that the annual consumption of fish per person has almost doubled from 1960 to today. In terms of nutritional aspects, fish products account for 6.7 per cent of all protein consumed in the world and contribute 20 per cent of the average animal protein requirement for almost half the world population.[3]

3. This reflection would not be complete without emphasising that, according to FAO analyses, at the global level, the capture of one-third of fish caught does not respect the rhythm of time necessary to ensure reproduction at biologically sustainable levels.[4] This depredation must be stopped because the economic development and the wide spectrum of benefits linked to this sector must not affect the protection of the environment, nor must they prevent consideration of the needs of the people who will come after us. Indeed, man’s work loses its true character if it causes damage and further serious deterioration to the environment.[5] That is, it is necessary to understand the deep connection between the “human environment” and the “natural environment”. Pope Francis reminds us very well in his encyclical *Laudato si*’, in which he insists on the promotion of an “integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions” (no.137). Indeed, “the human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to the causes related to human and social degradation” (no. 48). Some aspects of the fisheries sector testify to this common degradation, which is on the one hand environmental, and on the other human and social, and which hides forms of human rights violations, forced labour and trafficking in human beings.[6] It should also be mentioned that these violations have among their possible causes precisely phenomena such as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In fact, as has been emphasised in recent studies,[7] the gradual depletion of fishery resources in coastal waters has forced fishermen to move to areas further away from the coast. This has made it necessary to recruit crews that remain in the fisheries for long periods of time. The increase in costs, in terms of capital and labour, as a result of a longer stay at sea, has led to the hiring of “low cost” workers, so to speak, to allow wage savings.

In general, the members of these crews come from very poor areas. They are people who live in destitution and are burdened by the lack of work. Many of them are young, often illiterate or with a low level of education, and can therefore easily be deceived. Others, instead, have a diploma awarded by nautical schools and accept any work so as not to wait indefinitely for a better paid job in the merchant navy. Recruitment agencies have no scruples. They propose the work in the fishing boats as bearable and well paid and they make their victims sign a contract that proposes a salary that very rarely can be described as fair. Generally, it is a tiny wage, far from what should really correspond to a worker engaging in a hard, dangerous and exhausting activity. Fishermen are even asked to pay a certain amount of money in order to obtain the job and are so they and their families are forced to borrow or to mortgage their own land. Recruitment agencies, finally, since fishermen are often required to embark on ports in the territory of another state, are also those who organise the transfer of workers recruited at the ports of embarkation to their destination, and claim to facilitate the issuance of visas.

Once they have boarded, the fishermen encounter the harsh reality. They often live isolated in the fisheries for several years, making it impossible to develop a normal family and social life. The ships where they embark are enormous and do not need to dock in the ports, as they have smaller boats with which it is possible to transport to land what has been caught and to be supplied with fuel. The lack of access to ports therefore prevents the flight of fishermen who are victims of abuse, or of those who wish to request assistance from the authorities, often involved in trafficking.

The conditions inside the fishing boats are terrible: fishermen are forced to work for 18-20 hours a day, 7 days a week, often enduring inclement weather; often they are short of food and drinking water is rationed; sleep deprivation, disease and malnutrition can facilitate the occurrence of occupational accidents; they lack safety equipment, dignified and adequate medical care and medicines; the cabins are narrow and do not respect the most basic hygienic or sanitary standards.

Workers suffer physical and verbal abuse and are subjected to punishment that creates tensions that can lead to riots, serious incidents and even homicides. Women and children are often victims of sexual violence, and when fishermen dock in ports, many are forced into prostitution. There have been cases in which fishermen have been killed and their bodies thrown into the sea.

Often, fishermen on board fishing boats are not even able to understand that they are victims of violations of their human rights. They believe that the situation they live in is only the result of their bad luck. The lack of awareness of their exploitation hinders the possibility of requesting intervention and help. Communicating with the outside is in any case very difficult: on-board communication devices, such as radio and satellite phones, cannot be used. Furthermore, it is clear from the transnational nature of fishing operations that fishermen should be protected by the flag State of the vessel. However, if the states in which the fishery has been registered do not offer guarantees in terms of work, fishermen run the risk of being in a situation of extreme vulnerability.

I cannot fail to point out the paradox that sometimes fishermen are even subject to sanctions by coastal states for their participation in illegal fishing activities. This phenomenon is worsening the already complex and intricate situation in which these people are immersed, which shows, on the one hand, that migration, as pointed out by Pope Francis, "is growing into a tragic situation of global proportions"<sup>[8]</sup>, and on the other, the levels of inhumanity that human trafficking can reach. The Holy Father recently defined these scourges as forms of modern slavery, and with good reason.<sup>[9]</sup> To this is added another crucial issue of these times: an inability, both in the economic systems of developed and developing countries, to create jobs, to enable people to make the talents they were endowed with bear fruit, and to face others with dignity.

4. Unfortunately, we do not know the exact number of fishermen involved in this painful phenomenon that violates their human rights, including the right to decent work.<sup>[10]</sup> But we know that there are at least 20.9 million people working under duress in the world who are largely employed in the informal and illegal economy,<sup>[11]</sup> that 90 per cent of forced labour concerns private activities and, above all, activities that are labour-intensive, including fishing.

5. As Cardinal Parolin rightly pointed out, in order to address this phenomenon it is necessary to aim at "three

fundamental objectives: aid for fishermen who are exploited and deprived of their dignity, to facilitate their rehabilitation and reintegration; compliance of states and governments with the international rules in force on fishing, and more specifically on labour in the fishing sector; and combating human trafficking using means, including coercive measures, to enforce the rule of law and basic human rights. The ultimate aim is to safeguard in our seas the legality that for centuries has been a sign of freedom and civilisation".[12] This would be facilitated if the countries of origin of the fishermen, for example, were to monitor the recruitment processes of the crews and promoted collective contracting able to offer guarantees to those hired. This would also facilitate labour mobility for those seeking to improve their living conditions and, at the same time, the respect for international regulations on the prevention, repression and prosecution of human trafficking. The states of origin of the fishermen should also facilitate and accept the return of victims of trafficking or forced labour, whether they are citizens or have the right to live permanently in their territory. There could also be an increase in the legal measures and safeguard procedures to which victims of trafficking and forced labour in the fisheries sector could benefit, also on board the fishing vessels themselves. Victims of this serious phenomenon could be granted temporary residence permits in the countries of the fishery in order to provide them with the opportunity to cooperate with the judicial system.

6. It is important not to underestimate these dramas that I have described. However, they are often ignored or misrepresented. At other times, unfortunately, they are the subject of ephemeral headlines in the press, and are then lost in the fog of oblivion. It is a matter of humanity that the voices of those who suffer these tragedies can be heard and their legitimate rights be truly and justly recognised. Nor should we forget the precarious situations experienced by those who are employed throughout the fishery production chain and in the aquaculture sector and who suffer from the lack of minimum contractual guarantees. Indeed, workers often live in situations of precariousness due to the temporary nature of their contracts, not being sufficiently and adequately remunerated or because they are deprived of any form of social protection, which is especially necessary when unpleasant situations occur. Think, for example, of accidents that may occur in incubators and in the structures in which fish are farmed.

All these practices not only violate the right to decent work of those employed in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, but also damage the reputation of the sector and all those who work in it in a careful and legal manner.

7. We cannot mention only the defects and failures of the sector. With the passage of time progress and advances have been made. There have been situations that have improved and the existence of instruments capable of guaranteeing decent work in the field of fisheries and aquaculture has greatly contributed to this. Consider, for example, the *ILO Convention on Forced Labour* (No. 29) of 1930 and its *Protocol* adopted in 2014, which entered into force in November 2016 and commits its Members to take effective measures to prevent and eliminate the use of forced labour, to ensure protection of workers and access to adequate and effective remedies and redress mechanisms, as well as compensation, and to punish those responsible for bad practices.

In 2007, the International Labour Organization (ILO) also adopted the *Work in Fishing* (No. 188), which will enter into force this coming 16 November and which offers a set of guarantees for fishermen with regard to the minimum age of the worker, medical care and regular periods of rest from work, and all with the aim of preserving the safety and health of workers, the presence of sufficient water and food in the workplace, and hygiene and habitability in accommodation. It also regards the provision of accurate information regarding the recruitment of workers and the stipulation of the employment contract in order to avoid possible abuses.

The FAO too has adopted legal instruments that can make an important contribution to the cause of fishermen exploited in fishing. One example is the *Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing* (22 November 2009), which entered into force in June 2016, and reinforces inspections in the ports and denies access to ports to illegally fishing vessels (IUU), thus discouraging those who promote trafficking, exploitation and forced labour of fishermen. Lastly, we must not forget the *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries* (1995) and the *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication* of 2014.

8. These legal initiatives and regulatory measures are of great value and must be ensured by their

implementation. But, for the sector to which we are referring to achieve greater benefits, a supplement is necessary. It is the moral obligation of a change of mentality. That is to say, we must abandon the idea of an economy that favours profit at all costs and forgets the supreme value of the human being and his fundamental rights, including the right to decent work. In other words, and in the light of the Social Doctrine of the Church, it is necessary to continue to affirm the intrinsic priority of work in relation to capital. Indeed work, precisely because of its subjective and personal nature, is superior to other factors of production, which must be seen as instrumental.

It is important for this perspective to be strengthened, to eliminate all the defects that darken a sector as important as fishing by overcoming particular and petty interests, and ending once and for all those injustices that cause many fishermen, even now in the 21st century, to be immersed in dramatic situations of exploitation and abuse, almost as in a regime of slavery.

9. The Church has always looked with special preference to those who live and work at sea. In the message for World Food Day 1986, Saint John Paul II, recalled the particular attention given by the Church to the fishing sector, "inasmuch as the Lord Jesus chose His first Apostles among the fishermen of the lake of Galilee and knew by experience their hard life". For its part, the Holy See, which has always shown a significant sensitivity for the workers of the sea, is ready to offer its own support to governments, international governmental and non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations and the private sector, and all those who wish to champion decent work in fisheries and aquaculture.

No one should be marginalised or feel excluded from collaboration with cause as noble as the ensuring that every worker, including those engaged in fishing and aquaculture, be guaranteed conditions of justice, freedom, dignity, economic security and equal opportunities. This will become reality with the commitment of all, with strong political will and decisive social support to ensure each worker a decent and dignified job, always keeping the human person and his fundamental rights at the centre.

Thank you for your attention.

Msgr. Fernando Chica Arellano  
Holy See Observer at the FAO, IFAD and WFP

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[1] Cf. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Workers. *Message for World Day of Fishing* (21 November 2013). It is also possible to consult the messages from this dicastery for the subsequent years, in which the same concepts are affirmed.

[2] Cf. FAO, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2016. Contributing to food security and nutrition for all*, Rome 2016.

[3] Cf. *Ibid.*

[4] Cf. *Ibid.*

[5] Cf. Cardinal Peter Turkson, *Opening address at the International Seminar on "Sustainable development and the future of work in the context of the Jubilee of Mercy"*, Rome, 2 May 2016.

[6] Cf. ILO, *Caught at Sea – Forced labour and trafficking in fisheries*, Geneva, 2013.

[7] Cf. ILO, *Fishers First: Good practices to end labour exploitation at sea*, Geneva 2016; HLPE, *Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for food security and nutrition. A Report by the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security*. Rome, 2014; ILO, *Caught at Sea –Forced labour and trafficking in fisheries*, Geneva, 2013.

[8] POPE FRANCIS, *Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2017* (15 January 2017).

[9] Cf. POPE FRANCIS, *Angelus* (30 July 2017).

[10] Cf. ILO, *Fishers First – Good practices to end labour exploitation at sea*, Geneva, 2016.

[11] Cf. ILO, *Global Estimates of Forced Labour. Results and methodology*, Geneva, 2012.

[12] CARDINAL PIETRO PAROLIN, *Breaking the chains of exploitation in the fishing sector*, in AA.VV., *Human rights violations in the fishing sector. Presentation during World Day of Fishing in the FAO*. Rome, 2017, 21.

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