

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE



Message for World Fisheries Day

(21 November 2013)

Every year on November 21st, fishing communities around the world celebrate World Fisheries Day to highlight the precarious situation in which many of them live, as well as the importance of preserving the resources of the sea.

In recent years, the fishing sector has grown according to the logic of profit: fill the nets as much as possible, in the shortest possible time often, with little consideration for fish stocks and for the time required for their reproduction. The aim of making more money affects the whole fishing world from the industrial to the artisanal one, and leads fishers to work long hours, sometimes in bad weather, with an excess of fatigue that often is the cause of injuries and sometimes even of fatal accidents. Generally, but especially in cases of tragedies at work, social protection for the fisher and his family is minimal, if not non-existent.

Within the industrial fisheries, employment contracts are incomplete or illegal, the salary is inadequate, and minimum safety requirements on-board are lacking, meanwhile in the artisanal fisheries, coastal pollution and destruction along the coasts of the natural habitat of reproduction force the fishers to go further and further offshore with inadequate boats, endangering their lives.

Family relationships of those engaged in fishing are put to the test by prolonged stays at sea and very short permanence in the family. The fisher's wife courageously faces the difficulties caused by the absence of the husband, assuming the dual role of father and mother, with serious implications for the growth and education of their children.

The work schedule and the hard life, sometimes associated with the lack of education, makes the fishers "voiceless" people in society, incapable of enforcing their rights, often marginalized and isolated.

Finally, the globalization of fishing and labor shortages have created a new and troubling phenomenon to be reckoned with. We are talking about the exploitation of migrant workers who, because of poverty and misery, easily fall prey to recruitment agencies that bind them to forms of forced labor, becoming at times victims of trafficking on board fishing vessels.

Recalling the words of Pope Benedict XVI addressed to the participants of the XXIII World Congress, held in Vatican City in November 2012: *"To you fishermen, who seek decent and safe working conditions, safeguarding the dignity of your families, the protection of the environment and the defense of every person's dignity, I would like to ensure the Church's closeness"*. The AOS, once more, wants to be the voice of the voiceless and to expose the problems and difficult working/living conditions of fishers and their families.

We renew our appeal to all governments to ratify, as soon as possible, the Work in Fishing Convention 2007 (No. 188) to ensure safety at work to those employed in the fisheries, to ensure ongoing medical care, sufficient hours of rest, the protection of a contract of employment, and the same social benefits enjoyed by workers on the ground.

Finally, making ours the words of Pope Francis, let us pray together Mary, the "Star of the Sea", to support the chaplains and volunteers of the Apostleship of the Sea in their pastoral service to the people of the sea, and to protect fishers and their families from all danger: *"Mother of God and our Mother, turn your sweet gaze towards those who face the dangers of the sea everyday to guarantee their families the necessary sustenance for life, to protect the respect of creation, to serve peace between peoples."* (Lampedusa, 8 July 2013)

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