

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE



World Fisheries Day Message

(21th November 2014)

“Fishing is in fact one of the oldest and arduous human activity and it is generally poorly paid or rewarded. The forms of fishing are as many and varied almost as the kind of fish that they catch. Like all seafarers, fishers most of the time are sailing and spend very little time with their family and, on account of their way of life, they are often marginalized and deprived of the ordinary pastoral ministry”¹.

On the annual celebration of World Fisheries Day, the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) International would like to draw attention to the fishing sector that provides employment and livelihood for circa 58.3 million people, of which 37 percent are engaged full time.

In this day, I would like to call on all the national and local AOS to renew their commitment to establish a significant presence in fishing ports and develop specific programmes to make fishers and their families an integral part of the local Christian community, giving them the opportunity to express themselves and their needs without being isolated.

Ratification of the Work in Fishing Convention (2007) C 188

Fishing is recognized as one of the most dangerous profession in the world with hundreds of lives lost at sea every year and many more affected by occupational hazards. Fishers can be easily exploited, abused and become victims of trafficking and forced labor, as it has been reported and documented in the mass media.

Once ratified, the Work in Fishing Convention (2007) C 188, adopted at the 96th International Labour Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO), will be a useful tool, if not to totally eradicate these circumstances at least to improve them by bringing additional protection and benefits. As a matter of fact, the objectives of the Convention are to ensure that all fishers engaged in commercial fishing operations have decent working conditions on board of the fishing vessels with regard to accommodation and food; occupational safety and health protection; medical care and social security.

The Convention will enter into force 12 months after the date on which ten Members, eight of which are coastal States, will ratify it. As of April 17th 2014, the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) has been ratified by: Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Congo, Morocco, and South Africa.

It is necessary that AOS around the world continue to lobby at regional and national level for its ratification. Meetings, seminars or workshops should be organized to present, explain and inform government people, fishers and fishers' organizations on the structure and contents of the Convention and have it ratified. Until this goal is achieved, fishers will continue to be abused, exploited and die at sea.

A new approach to fishing

Our oceans and their resources are under an enormous pressure. A report from the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicates that 30 percent of the world's fisheries stocks are currently being overexploited, depleted or are recovering from depletion.

This is caused by a number of factors such as: by-catch of species (marine mammals, seabirds, turtles, etc.) unintentionally caught in fishing gears; discards as part of the catch to be returned to the sea as their marketing is prohibited or not commercially viable. Fishing, especially trawling, also has a direct impact on the habitat in which it takes place. To all this we have to add the climate changes, the illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, pollution and the use of dynamite and cyanide.

Since time immemorial, fishing has been a source of food for humankind and made major contributions to fishing nations' economies, employing millions of people worldwide and feeding millions more. However, as we have reached a critical point, it is necessary to practice responsible fishing and respecting nature; the risk is that within a limited period of time many coastal communities that are relying on fishing for their subsistence and economy, will lose their source of livelihood. As Pope Francis reminds us: *"This is one of the greatest challenges of our time: changing to a form of development which seeks to respect creation.[...] This is our sin: exploiting the land and not allowing it to give us what it has within it."*^[2]

May the Blessed Virgin, often prayed and invoked with different appellatives by fishers and their families, continue to extend her maternal protection to all the fishing communities and support the AOS Chaplains and volunteers involved in this apostolate.

Antonio Maria Cardinal Vegliò

President

✠ Joseph Kalathiparambil

Secretary

^[1]PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE, Manual for Chaplains and Pastoral Workers of the Apostleship of the Sea, 2008

^[2]POPE FRANCIS, Meeting with the world of labour and industry in the Great Hall of the University of Molise in Campobasso, 5 July 2014