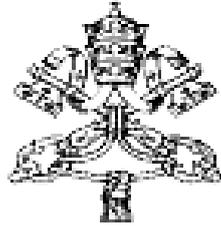


PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE



World Fisheries Day Message

(21th November 2015)

World Fisheries Day was established in 1998 and is celebrated each year on November 21 to draw attention to overfishing, habitat destruction and other serious threats to the sustainability of our marine resources. Pope Francis in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*: on care for our common home, reminds us how important is to safeguard the source of food for a great part of humanity and of employment opportunities for over 50 million people worldwide: “*Oceans not only contain the bulk of our planet’s water supply, but also most of the immense variety of living creatures, many of them still unknown to us and threatened for various reasons. What is more, marine life in rivers, lakes, seas and oceans, which feeds a great part of the world’s population, is affected by uncontrolled fishing, leading to a drastic depletion of certain species. Selective forms of fishing which discard much of what they collect continue unabated. Particularly threatened are marine organisms which we tend to overlook, like some forms of plankton; they represent a significant element in the ocean food chain, and species used for our food ultimately depend on them (No. 40).*”

We remain concerned and continue to work for the preservation of the marine ecosystem, even by recognizing the importance of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries adopted twenty years ago by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Conference. When implemented the Code of Conduct will lead to an improved and sustainable economic, social and environmental contribution of the fisheries sector.

However, in this special day we would like to focus our attention on the fishers and their families who every day with great sacrifices work to satisfy the unquenchable appetite for fish around the world.

We are all aware that fisheries is one of the most complex and vast industry and also one of the most difficult and dangerous profession in the world.

In recent months, because of the number of tragic happenings especially in South East Asia, the issues of trafficking, forced labor, exploitation and abuses of fishers have been reported in several mass media but sadly this did not attract much of attention and interest from the people in general.

The illegal recruitment and smuggling/trafficking of people with the intention of employing them for forced labor on board of fishing vessels are practices still widely used to trap poor and uneducated people from rural areas of developing countries.

Fake and illegal contracts or simple pieces of papers without any legal value stating the working conditions and the ludicrous salary that the fishers receive for working long hours, are legitimizing their slave condition.

Occupational accidents, permanent injuries without any compensation and sudden death or disappearance at sea are the nightmares in which many young people and families found themselves while trying to improve their miserable life with a work on board of a fishing vessel.

This dramatic situation in which thousands of fishers are trapped, is caused by the logic of profit that drives many fishing companies owners and companies aiming at higher gain in the distribution of their seafood products.

Knowing this reality we cannot remain indifferent and using the words of Pope Francis, we would like to denounce that working in fishing is often: *"... the tragedy of work exploitation and of living under inhumane conditions. It's not work that gives dignity. Every community must fight against the cancer of corruption, the cancer of human and work exploitation. Against the poison of that which is illegal."* (Cathedral of Prato, 10th November 2015)

- In order to restore the dignity in the work of fisheries, it is necessary that all the different social forces join hands, everyone fulfilling its specific responsibilities.
- We request the Flag States, Port Authorities, Coast Guard and the proper authorities in charge of maritime affairs to strengthen their control in the implementation of all the relevant national and international laws and Conventions to protect the human and labor rights of the fishers.
- We call on seafood companies to implement due diligence by applying strict guidelines/policies that will eliminate human and labor exploitation in their supply chains.
- We appeal to the consumers to be vigilant and more conscious not only of the quality of the seafood that they are buying but also of the human and labor conditions of the fishers.

- We invite the maritime NGO's to lobbying the Member States of ILO that have adopted the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188) to ratify it in order to guarantee a safe working environment and better welfare provisions for the fishers.
- We encourage the Chaplains and volunteers of the Apostleship of the Sea to continue their pastoral ministry for fishers and their families offering material and spiritual support especially to the victims of forced labor and human trafficking in the fishing industry.

May Mary Stella Maris continue to be the source of strength and protection to all the fishers and their families.

Antonio Maria Card. Vegliò

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