



Government working with UN and fishing industry on labor rights

Thailand's Ministry of Labor has begun leading a consultative process with fishing industry companies, United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organizations designed to develop a code of good practices that will protect migrant workers exploitation, abuse and trafficking in the fishing industry.

Some activist groups and media have alleged that Thailand's fishing industry is rife with workers who are illegally trafficked from neighboring Myanmar, Cambodia and other countries, some of whom are underage and many of whom are treated badly and abused. The Thai government and many large fishing companies have strongly denied the allegations, saying that instances of abuse are rare and usually don't involve major firms. But the government takes the issue seriously and is taking steps to try and formalize a sector where informal labor is common.

The first meeting on Good Labor Practices in the Fishing Sector was held January 21 at the Princeton Park Hotel in Bangkok and attended by over 30 participants. It was chaired by Chokchai Srithong, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Labor Protection and Welfare at the Ministry of Labor.

The meeting initiated discussions aimed at jointly developing a body of good labor practices including a set of guidelines for the fishing sector on employment and working conditions. These guidelines will comply with the core conventions of the International Labor Organization of the United Nations labor standards, labor laws and the Thailand Labor Standard Ethics already agreed to by fishing vessel entrepreneurs in Thailand.

The guidelines will serve as a criteria for Thai fishing vessels entrepreneurs to raise standard of employment, improve working conditions and serve as a good model. The guidelines will prohibit the use of forced labor, debt bondage labour and child labor, while also addressing issues of freedom of association, an employment good practice checklist, employment agreements, remuneration, working hours, holidays, leave, labor relations promotion, document records, the use of young worker, welfare (shelter, food), as well as improved safe working conditions with fishing tools.

Also in attendance were Max Tunon and Tuomo Poutiainen, representatives of the International Labor Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, representatives of the Department of Labor Protection and Welfare, representatives of the Department of Employment, Department of Fisheries, Department of Marine, National Fishery Association of Thailand, the Thai Oversea Fishery Association, Asian Research Center for Migration and the Human Rights and Development Foundation.

The Ministry of Labor is also establishing seven centers that will oversee and monitor the recruitment of workers for the fishing industry in order to prevent human trafficking and labor abuse by brokers and others who have been sourcing labor for the industry.