



## **Seafood industry joins government fight against labor abuse**

In a sign of greater private sector awareness and responsibility, several Thai seafood industry associations are joining forces with the Thai government to fight human trafficking, child labor and forced labor, which have cast a shadow upon the country's shrimp and seafood exports, and its food processing industry.

Industry groups attended a ceremony, presided over by Thailand's Minister of Labor Padermchai Sasombat last week where they signed a "Declaration of Intent for Jointly Combating Child Labor and Forced Labor in Shrimp, Seafood, Fishing and Relating Industry." The signing was witnessed by Sek Wannamethee, Director-General of the Department of America and South Pacific Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and attended by representatives of the International Labor Organization (ILO), civil society groups and the media.

Among the groups that were signatories to the Declaration were the Thai Frozen Foods Association, Thai Shrimp Association, Thai Food Processors' Association, National Fisheries Association of Thailand, the Thai Overseas Fisheries Association, the Thai Fishmeal Producers Association, and the Sea Food Primary Processors Club. The Declaration stated:

- Realizing that laborers contribute to the national economy, we should promote and support them to have decent work while upholding their dignity.
- Recognizing and facilitating collaboration to combat child labor and eliminating forced labor to comply with the labor law and international labor standards.
- Providing greater support on labor protection in the areas of working conditions, working employment, and wage payment under the law, as well as promoting the quality of life and the dignity of employees.

Vice Minister Anusorn urged all owners in the fish and shrimp industries to comply with the Thai labor laws, which meet international standards. Combating child labor and forced labor is a national priority, Mr. Sek said, adding that the Ministry is collaborating with the Ministry of Labor and other agencies on the implementation of Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan. Please visit [http://royalthaiembassy.cmail1.com/t/ViewEmail/r/16998935E971F859#toc\\_item\\_3](http://royalthaiembassy.cmail1.com/t/ViewEmail/r/16998935E971F859#toc_item_3) for more information.

Similar declaration was also made by entrepreneurs in the garment industry, please visit <http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/media-center/14/30034-Declaration-of-Intent-by-Ministry-of-Labour-and-Ga.html> for more information.

Reports have emerged in recent years about forced labor on Thai fishing vessels and child labor in fish and other food processing businesses. Although few actual cases have been identified, Thai police believe the problem is a serious one and has been stepping up enforcement actions, as well as training officers on implementation of relevant laws and investigation techniques. They say that transnational criminal gangs, often involved in other illegal businesses such as drugs and weapons smuggling, run the human trafficking rackets. Victims are sometimes illegal migrants, and are often fearful of police and other authorities and so refuse to cooperate and provide evidence against the traffickers.

A 2006 study on abuses in the shrimp and seafood industries by the Thailand Development Research Institute, the country's premier independent think tank, found that child labor did exist in food processing, and particularly seafood process businesses, but that most seafood processing businesses involved in exporting only hired workers above 18 years old. It was more common to find child labor in businesses that are subcontractors.

While taking employers of child laborers to task, the study also said that "child workers lied about their age so employers have employed them unknowing that they were under-age. Also, the employer did not force them to work; it was the children's decision to work. Moreover, in all of the case studies, child workers have been paid the same wage rate as adults."