



## **Press Release: Royal Thai Embassy, Washington, D.C.**

### **Thai Fisheries Reforms Comprehensive and Irreversible Thailand Fully Committed to Sustainability and Ethical Seafood Supply Chain**

Comprehensive and irreversible reforms are taking place in Thailand to make Thai seafood supply chain clean of illegal fishing, illegal labor practices and human trafficking, said Ambassador Pisan Manawapat, Ambassador of Thailand to the United States, at the Seafood Expo North America in Boston on March 7, 2016.

Speaking at a session “Moving forward with sustainability: Latest updates on seafood supply chain reform in Thailand” at the annual Boston Expo – one of the largest seafood events in the world, Ambassador Pisan stressed that Thailand accepted that there were problems in the country but the Government has made significant progress in tackling these problems head-on. Laws have been toughened up, enforcement has been beefed up, victims are being protected and rehabilitated, and criminals have been brought to justice. The Thai Government recognized that there is still room for improvement and believed that partnership with all relevant stakeholders, including neighboring countries, International Labor Organization (ILO) and other international organizations, as well as civil society groups is the way forward.

The event was attended by a wide range of participants from the private sector, civil society groups and the media. The participants were briefed about key highlights and latest updates concerning the fisheries reforms in Thailand by a panel of senior officials from the Command Center for Combating Illegal Fishing (CCCIF) and those in charge of law enforcement, labor protection and fisheries management.

In his welcome remarks, Mr. John Connelly, President of National Fisheries Institute, said the coming together in Boston of this group of key people in charge of various aspects of the reforms reflected the seriousness the Thai Government in tackling these problems.

Ambassador Pisan expressed his confidence that Thailand is moving in the right direction and will continue to strive for the highest standards of sustainability and ethics. He said this will be an ongoing process and challenges are to be expected along the way. He stressed that, for the Thai Government, this is neither about market share or profit nor it is about ranking in any country’s report. Rather, it is about human dignity and Thailand’s commitment to human rights.

Ambassador Pisan recalled that the Thai seafood industry has made a pledge in January this year with the Thai Government to clean its supply chain of illegal fishing, illegal labor practices and human trafficking. He said the Thai Government will hold them to their pledge and urged U.S. buyers and interested parties to also hold them to their pledge.

Admiral Paladej Charoenpool, Chief Monitoring Control System of the CCCIF, said all relevant agencies in Thailand have now worked under one umbrella of the Command Center which has led to better coordination, quicker decision-making, more integrated actions across line agencies and less red tape. The Command Center has also pushed ahead with a range of measures to enhance oversight measures of the fisheries sector, such as the establishment of Port-in Port-out centers along coastal provinces, mandatory installation of the satellite-tracking Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) devices on fishing vessels, and at-sea inspections.

The Thai law enforcement agencies are fully committed to fighting human trafficking and labor abuses, said Police Major General Jaruvat Vaisaya, Chief Law Enforcement Oversight of the Command Center. He stressed that wrongdoers will be punished without exception and victims will be protected no matter they are Thais or migrant workers. He added that Thailand is currently the first and the only country in Southeast Asia to have set up dedicated units on human trafficking in all agencies of the criminal justice system. Looking ahead, he said, greater international cooperation on training and capacity building for law enforcement officials on human trafficking will be very useful.

Systematic efforts are being made to protect migrant workers in Thailand and reduce their vulnerabilities to human trafficking and labor abuses, said Mr. Singhadet Chu-Umnart, Inspector-General of the Ministry of Labor. He pointed to measures, such as regularization scheme for undocumented migrant workers so that they will be able to work in Thailand legally and with protections like Thai workers. Persons under 18 years old are now banned from working on the fishing vessels and in seafood processing facilities. Migrant workers in the fisheries sector now have better job mobility with ability to change their employers. Thailand has worked closely with countries in Asia to promote more channels for regular migration and employment; thus reducing the demands for human traffickers. Cooperation with the ILO to upgrade Thailand's labor standards is also ongoing.

Thai fisheries management has also entered a new chapter, said Dr. Adisorn Promthep, Deputy Director General of the Department of Fisheries. He said the new Fisheries Law that entered into force in November 2015 is an important milestone, marking a fundamental change from an open access system to a managed access system to ensure long-term sustainability. Based on a scientific approach, the new system will enable the Thai authorities to better manage marine resources in the Thai waters. The new Fisheries Law will also enhance control over Thai fishing vessels in the high seas through better oversight measures. In the meantime, Thailand is building a traceability system for seafood supply chain through a computerized system that is line with international standards, said Dr. Adisorn.

With stringent oversight and punishments as well as a growing call for corporate social responsibility, the Thai Ambassador to the U.S. believed that human trafficking and labor abuses problems in the Thai fisheries sector will be effectively addressed. It would not make business sense for any Thai companies to continue engaging in unacceptable practices because they would not be able to compete, he stressed.

The Thai Government stands ready to expand and strengthen cooperation with all interested stakeholders, including foreign governments, international organizations, private sector, civil society groups, and the media. He cited ongoing cooperation with the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) and the Labor Rights Promotion Network Foundation (LPN) as useful. He added that Thailand has also reached out the Skytruth – a company specialized in satellite technology analysis and a partner of the Global Fishing Watch project – to explore how their system can add value to the VMS system that Thailand is using in order to strengthen the oversight.

Ambassador Pisan said he is optimistic and confident that this current reform process in Thailand will be sustainable and long-lasting, and that it could serve as a role model for efforts to address problems of illegal fishing, illegal labor practices and human trafficking in other places around the world. We want to expand cooperation and share our experiences in order to encourage greater transparency and accountability worldwide, he said.

For further information on progress of reforms, please see the attached factsheet.

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