



Press Release : NGO Affirms Greater Improvement in Labour Conditions within the Fisheries Sector

Date 15 March 2018, 12:12:32

On 11 March 2018, H.E. Mr. Virachai Plasai, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations in New York, presided over the opening of the "Thailand's Path to Sustainable Fisheries" Seminar, held during the Seafood Expo North America (SENA) 2018 at Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, Boston, USA. Presented alongside representatives from Thai government agencies and the business community was Ms. Apinya Tajit, Deputy Director of Stella Maris, an NGO that has been working closely with the Thai Government on increasing protection of the migrant workers in the fisheries sector.

Ms. Apinya Tajit spoke to an audience comprising representatives from agencies of the US government, International Organisations, major importers of fisheries products, National Fisheries Institute, as well as media representatives. At the outset, she clearly stated that her presence did not indicate to support the Thai Government, but wished to tell the truth regarding the situation on the ground. She stressed that the situation has drastically improved as there has been closer coordination among the Thai government agencies and various NGOs in solving the labour issues. Another milestone is that NGOs now have seats in the Working Group on Labour Relations Promotion in Sea Fishing Operation, to work with the government to ensure that seafarers are better protected, not only as part of the inspection teams, but also as part of the law enforcement teams. She asked the audience to see for themselves what is happening in Thailand and to be cautious of news reports which may be biased and based on old data prior to Thailand's embarking on the reform of labour management in the fisheries sector three years ago.

Her words echoed those of Ambassador Virachai who summarised the overall progress of Thailand's fight against IUU fishing. He emphasised that Thailand has some of the most advanced laws against IUU fishing in the world. The efforts and progress made by Thailand was recognised in the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s "Baseline research findings on fishers and seafood workers in Thailand" report which was published on 28 February 2018. The report recognised the positive developments for workers in the fisheries sector with fewer cases of physical violence and a significant reduction in child labour. The ILO acknowledged that Thailand is currently at the forefront for promoting fair treatment of migrant workers in the region.

The major importers who attended the seminar, including Walmart, showed confidence in Thailand's direction towards combatting IUU fishing and illegal labour and praised the progress achieved so far. They also viewed Thailand as a regional leader in solving this complex problem and were willing to work with Thailand to introduce successful fishing-related measures to nearby countries. Mr. Poj Aramwattananont, President of the Thai Frozen Food Association, representing the Thai private sector, also assured the audience that all sectors in Thailand are committed to working together. The Thai private sector fully supports the government in strictly adhering to the laws and regulations with regard to treatment of migrant workers as well as the relevant regulations in the fisheries industry so that the seafood products from Thailand will meet international standards.

In addition to the previous mentioned speakers, the Thai delegation, composed of Mrs. Petcharat Sin-auay, Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Mr. Adisorn Promthep, Director-General of the Department of Fisheries, and Pol Lt Gen Jaruwat Waisaya, head of law enforcement at

the Command Center for Combating Illegal Fishing, also took part in addressing the audience and answering questions regarding the combatting of IUU fishing, the path towards sustainable fisheries, IUU-free Thailand policy, measures to prevent forced labour, and effective law enforcement against wrongdoers.