

Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation News

Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours

Slavery in the Seafood Industry



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"...These new forms of slavery – human trafficking, forced labor, prostitution, the trade in organs – are serious crimes and an open wound on the body of contemporary society."

(Pope Francis)

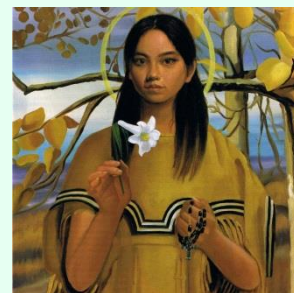
There are many and varied forms of modern day slavery and for those of us who enjoy the gifts from the sea, it is alarming to realize that human trafficking, forced labor and human rights abuses abound in the seafood industry.

In 2014, *The Guardian* published the findings from a six-month investigation which established that large numbers of men bought, sold, and held against their will on fishing boats off Thailand were integral to the production of shrimp sold in supermarkets around the world. The following year the *Associated Press (AP)* conducted a yearlong investigation that exposed how seafood linked to forced labor, human trafficking, and other abuses occurring on Thai vessels in Indonesia can enter the supply chains of major grocery stores. The AP's reporting earned them a Pulitzer Prize for public service in 2016.

In commemoration of the *World Day Against Human Trafficking* on July 30th, this issue of JPIC News will focus on human trafficking in the seafood industry – an aspect of human trafficking that may be an eye opener for many of us.

July
JPIC Days of Remembrance

July 12
St. Kateri Tekakwitha
Patroness of Ecology



July 28
World Hepatitis Day

July 30
World Day Against
Human Trafficking



Fish Facts

- Thailand produces approximately 4.2 million tons of seafood per year, around 90 per cent of which is exported around the world.
- Thailand's seafood industry employs more than 650,000 people with exports totaling \$7.3 billion. This includes the seafood processing sector, aquaculture and marine fisheries.
- Although all genders are involved in the seafood industry, victims aboard fishing vessels are primarily men and boys ranging from age 15 to over 50.
- The Thai seafood industry is today globally notorious for being one of the most abusive and destructive economic sectors in the world.

Sources: *Environmental Justice Foundation, UK;*
AP Investigation, Seafood from Slaves



Life in the Asian Seafood Industry

Reports from interviews with victims of trafficking aboard Thai fishing vessels found that:

- 68% experienced sexual or physical violence
- 46% experienced serious workplace injuries
- 23% were forcibly confined
- 6% were forced to drink water tainted with methamphetamine tainted with drugs

Reports from interviews with crew aboard Thai fishing vessels found that:

- 94% had no contracts
- 42% experienced arbitrary wage deductions
- 40% claimed they worked "indefinite hours"
- 17% worked against their will
- 10 % were severely beaten

As a result of the AP's Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporting, more than 2,000 trapped fishermen have been rescued. Thailand is under intense and increasing global pressure to address the use of trafficked, bonded, forced and slave labor in its fishing sector and crack down on the activities of its enormous industrial fishing fleets.

Sources: Greenpeace and Environmental Justice Foundation, UK



"If Americans and Europeans are eating this fish, they should remember us."

Hlaing Min, 30, a runaway fishery slave

Trafficking Survivor's Stories in the Fishing Industry



There was a Burmese guy from Taungoo called Anya. He went [to another boat during trans-shipment] to relax with his friends. When he came back, the captain kicked him. Anya cursed, he cursed at the captain. Without saying anything, the captain went to his cabin and took his gun and shot Anya two or three times through the window. Afterwards, they threw Anya into the sea. That captain is still alive in Kantang. *Thein Myat*



I'd been working for many years. I didn't get any money. Luckily, I didn't die. Here are the wounds that I got, where they stabbed me with their knives... I'd tried to escape from them ever since I was sent to the sea. But I was captured again, I was beaten. Since then, I decided that, whatever happens, I would run away when I went back to port. *Thein Myat*

Global demand for cheap seafood is one of the key drivers of both environmental degradation and human rights abuses in the fishing industry.

If we disappear for three or four hours whenever we are back in port, they assume we've fled. [The brokers] immediately show pictures of us to motorbike taxi drivers to get them to find us, offering them money if they bring us back. They also show the police and tell them who is escaping from which pier and offer them money as well to bring us back. That's what they do. *Aung Kyi*

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NOTE: In 2016 the US State Department's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, upgraded Thailand from tier 3, the lowest ranking on the list, to tier 2 watch list, indicating that the US government believes the Thai government has met the minimum standards required to fight trafficking. Although some issues have been addressed regarding trafficking in the seafood industry, this rating sparked controversy from many human rights groups. We will be paying attention to the 2017 ranking in the TIP report when it is issued later this month.