



“Ensuring socially, environmentally and commercially sustainable fisheries”

a COFI 33 side event

Under Article 94 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) every flag state has the duty vis-à-vis ships flying its flag to take measures to ensure their safety at sea with regard, inter alia, to (a) the construction, equipment and seaworthiness of ships, (b) the manning of ships, (c) the labour conditions of their crews, and (d) the training of their crews.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), all specialized agencies of the United Nations, have indeed developed and adopted international instruments on all four duty areas for fishing.

Sustainable fisheries is rightly high on their agendas. By definition, the three pillars of sustainability are People (social), Planet (environment) and Profit (economic). All three pillars require equal, well-balanced efforts in order to realize true sustainability, however insufficient attention has been given to the implementation of essential principles of international law on safety at sea and working conditions for fishers. Moreover, as globally reported, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is not only threatening the sustainability of the world's fisheries but is widely associated with crimes involving the safety and welfare of crews. This is even more worrying in view of the fact that fishing is considered a hazardous activity when compared to other occupations.

FAO estimates that roughly 30 million fishers are working aboard 4 million fishing vessels operating in the catching sector. About 98% of these vessels are below 24 metres in length, and are not adequately covered by international rules and regulations. Furthermore, the international Conventions applicable to vessels above 24 metres are poorly ratified by governments. ILO estimated in 1999 that the number of global fatalities amounted to 24 000 deaths per year world-wide. In light of these dramatic figures and long-lasting stand-still situation, policy-makers and

governments together with the fishing sector and civil society organisations are bound to explore ways to close the existing gap.

The momentum initiated by FAO and the Holy See joint event on labour conditions within the fisheries sector stressed the need to go from words to action. The ILO Tripartite Meeting on Issues relating to Migrant Fishers, convened in Geneva, Switzerland, from 18 to 22 September 2017 also called for the development, in close cooperation with other relevant agencies of the United Nations, of an effective roadmap for rapid worldwide implementation of the international agreements relating to work in the fishing sector. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) recently engaged with African countries in efforts to have all maritime countries in the region who are member States of the IMO to formally ratify a global agreement established to encourage and enforce the protection of fishermen across the world. The European Union has successfully transposed several international conventions into community Law. The Social Partners in the European Union (Europêche/ETF) have also been playing a leading role in the promotion of all these standards at EU and international level.

The aim of this event is to provide practical expert advice to and from international and national stakeholders and decision-makers to develop a roadmap towards widespread ratification of the international instruments for safety at sea in fishing and the protection of fishers' lives. Stakeholders will identify key international Conventions and regulations which can help closing the gap and also examples of best practices in order to better understand how to implement such measures. It will as well serve to enhance the cooperation between international bodies, governments and stakeholders in order to properly put in place these regulations.