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World Fisheries Day Message (21th November 2018)

World Fisheries Day was established in New Delhi, India, on November 21st, 1997 when for the first time representatives of small-scale, artisanal fishers and fish workers from 32 countries gathered together to form an international fishers' organization and committed themselves to support global sustainable fishing policies, practices and social justice.

To appreciate the importance of celebrating World Fisheries Day, it is enough to consider the FAO 2016 data indicating that 59.6 million people were engaged (on a full-time, part-time or occasional basis) in fisheries and aquaculture. Of these workers nearly 14% of were women. The great majority of the population engaged in these sectors were in Asia (85%), followed by Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. These together supply about 171 million tonnes of fish to the global market, and generate a first-sale value of production estimated at USD 320 billion. Global fish value chains that include production, processing, distribution and trade of fish, provide for the livelihoods of around 820 million people. Fish consumption provides about 3.2 billion people with nearly 20 percent of their animal protein.

Hidden within these significant figures which reveal the importance and contributions of the fishing sectors to food security, economic growth and poverty alleviation, there are countless and persistent challenging issues. Topping the list, aside from physical and verbal abuses, is the massive exploitation of fishers, including numerous cases of forced labor, human trafficking and disappearance at sea. We see direct links between all these abuses and the use of flags of convenience, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, and transnational crime. Besides, we should not forget the challenge of sustaining fish stocks, pollution and other environmental concerns.

From this distressing and painful reality, the fish workers are crying out for help; and, as Church, we cannot shut our ears and we cannot remain silent.

On the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): we would like to reaffirm Article 4 of the Declaration: *"No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms"*. Additionally, we wish to recall Article 23, as follows:

- 1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.*
- 2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.*
- 3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.*
- 4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.*

These fundamental labour rights are human rights, and they must be fishers' rights too!

Aware of the many problematic issues in fisheries, Member Countries of the specialized agencies of the United Nations¹ have adopted and endorsed several international instruments that, if ratified and fully implemented by all States, could dramatically change the life of fish workers, of their families and the environmental status of fisheries resources.

The fishing industry, which is considered by many as the main culprit for the difficult working and living conditions of fishers, is committed to solve these problems with product certification, while civil society and consumers are calling the retailers to be more responsible in their business and to exercise due diligence throughout their whole supply chain.

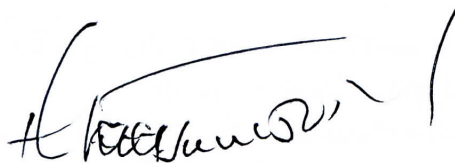
However, from reading the mass media reports on the issue and, most of all from hearing the harrowing stories recounted by the chaplains and volunteers of the Apostleship of the Sea around the world, it seems that all these efforts are not enough, because the number of governments that have ratified the international instruments is still very low and in some small areas, the fishing industry still suffers from the ruthlessness of profit-seeking policy makers.

As a Church, we would like to recall the exhortation of Pope Francis to put people before the profit, as follows: *"... Behind every activity there is a human being. [...] The current centrality of financial activity compared to the real economy is not random: behind this there is the choice of someone who thinks, wrongly, that money is made with money. Money, real money, is done with work. It is the work that gives dignity to man, not money"*².

As we celebrate World Fisheries Day, and as we expect to increase awareness on the situation of fish workers and create fundamental changes in their lives, we would like to call on international agencies, to join hands, putting aside differences, antagonism and rivalry, to develop a roadmap towards widespread ratification and implementation of the international instruments. This cooperation should be pursued at global, regional, national and local levels; and it should ensure the involvement of civil society, industry and retailers, NGOs, trade unions and the Church.

Working together, we can stop human trafficking and forced labor at sea, we can improve the safety of working conditions, and fight IUU fishing, in the hope of creating a socially, environmentally and commercially sustainable fisheries sector.

It is a great challenge but it is also the only hope that we have to reaffirm *"the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms"*³ in the global fisheries industry.



Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
Prefect

¹ International Maritime Organization (IMO), The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

² <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2018-09-07/intervista-papa-francesco-i-soldi-non-si-fanno-con-i-soldi-ma-con-il-lavoro-114036.shtml?uud=AEf2V5IF>

³ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Preamble