

Work in fishing

Protecting small-scale fishworkers

South Asian groups have unanimously decided to support the International Labour Organization's Work in Fishing Convention

Central trade unions of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and organizations in support of small-scale fisher people and unorganized fishworkers, took a unanimous decision for a unified position to support the International Labour Organization's 'Work in Fishing Convention' when it comes up for adoption at the 96th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva in June 2007.

At a meeting held at Sunflower Hotel, Negombo, Sri Lanka, from 10 to 11 February 2007, the participants agreed that the proposed ILO Fishing Convention will significantly contribute to decent work and social security in the marine fishing sector of South Asian workers on board domestic as well as foreign fishing vessels.

Considering that over 80 per cent of global fish production, fishing fleet and fishing workforce are from Asia, the participants called on the South Asian governments, trade unions and employers to demonstrate an issue-based unity in ensuring that the Convention is adopted at the ILC in June 2007.

Any international legal instrument that improves work and living conditions of fishers, upholds their dignity, and gives them identity as workers, especially in the context of globalization, should be welcomed, they said.

It was further advocated that the South Asian governments should enter into a proactive dialogue with the governments of Africa, Asia and Latin America in order to ensure that the Convention is adopted. It was suggested that the proposed ILO Work in Fishing Convention should be seen as a useful and practical guide.


The proposed Work in Fishing Convention is to update and strengthen the existing ILO instruments—the last one was adopted in 1966, long before the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—concerning minimum age, medical examination, articles of agreement, accommodation, competency certificates, vocational training and hours of work. It takes into account changes in the fishing sector for the past 40 years. It recognizes the profound impact of globalization on the fishing sector. It acknowledges that fishing today is the most hazardous occupation on earth. As a comprehensive standard, issues hitherto unaddressed in relation to persons working on board fishing vessels have been taken up, namely, occupational safety and health, and social security. Also for the first time, protection for persons working on board small fishing vessels has been proposed. Further, fishers who are paid on the basis of a share of the catch are covered for the first time. The proposed Convention, also for the first time, prescribes effective flag-State and port-State provisions of compliance and enforcement in relation to fishing vessels remaining at sea more than three days beyond the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the flag State.

The proposed ILO Convention is an enabling instrument with provisions for flexible implementation in terms of small-scale fishing vessels. The standard, once adopted, is to be progressively implemented. There are provisions to make amendments to the standard, if deemed necessary, but in consultation with the most representative worker and employer organizations.

International instrument

ILO, for the first time, is proposing an international legal instrument that

protects the interests of fishers on board small-scale fishing vessels, and this is of immense benefit to the South Asian countries that have a large share of the small-scale fishers of the world.

The participants further urge the tripartite constituents of the ILO to unanimously adopt the ILO Work in Fishing Convention when it comes up for consideration at the 96th session of the ILC in June 2007. 

Signatories to the Press Release

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This press release was issued at the conclusion of the South Asian Workshop of Trade Unions on 11 February 2007 at the Sunflower Beach Hotel, Negombo, Sri Lanka