

From Catcher to Counter

The ITF and the IUF are campaigning together to try and increase union power for all workers in fisheries

Fishers are in one of the most precarious occupations on earth, doing highly dangerous, stressful, yet insecure and largely unregulated jobs, in which appalling levels of exploitation and abuse are regularly uncovered. Many other jobs in the fishing industry are also unregulated, insecure and rife with exploitation.

Since 2012, the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has been working with the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) on the joint 'Catcher to Counter' campaign

All aspects of the industry are under increasing pressure as consumers and environmental groups lobby for improvements in sustainability. It is now internationally recognized that there is an inextricable link between violations of human and labour rights and food security issues. The ITF/IUF programme issued a statement in 2014 with a full list of requirements for the industry to clean up its act (<http://www.itfglobal.org/en/news-events/press-releases/2014/june/itf-iuf-press-release-unions-welcome-thai-fisher-slavery-exposé/>)

A key area of ITF's work is to lobby for ratification of the ILO Convention C.188, which seeks to provide acceptable minimum standards that protect fishers in all aspects of their work. Though the Convention has been adopted, it will not have real power until its ratification by at least 10 ILO member States. By the end of 2014, five ratifications had been achieved.

In 2012, ITF launched a users' guide to ILO C.188, in a bid to help fishers' unions and their members gain a deeper understanding of the Convention and lobby more effectively for its ratification. *The ILO Work in Fishing Convention 2007—A Guide for Unions* is available for free download in Arabic, English, French, Indonesian, Spanish and Tamil from <http://www.itfglobal.org/en/transport-sectors/fisheries/in-focus/ilo-work-in-fishing-convention/>.

Improving standards

In conjunction with lobbying for ILO C.188, ITF also continued to press employers to improve standards in the industry. ITF's European arm, the European Transport Workers'

...the primary focus is to increase the level of union participation in countries where there is a significant fishing presence in terms of employment and also economic reliance on the industry...

to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and to increase union power for all workers along the fisheries supply chain, from those at sea to those serving at the fish counter.

Central to the campaign, launched in 2011, were the twin goals of increased union representation in the fishing industry and ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Work in Fishing Convention 2007 (C.188). With projects in development phases around the globe, the primary focus is to increase the level of union participation in countries where there is a significant fishing presence in terms of employment and also economic reliance on the industry for inward investment and export markets.

This article is by **Liz Blackshaw** (Blackshaw_Liz@itf.org.uk), Programme Leader, ITF/IUF Organising Programme

Federation (ITF), secured an agreement with employers' bodies, which is based on the principles of ILO C.188, and made its way into European law. The agreement, signed in Gothenburg, Sweden, demonstrated a shared commitment to enhanced working and living conditions for fishers on board vessels registered in the European Union and those calling at European ports, regardless of their flag or crew nationality. It is expected to help tighten the legal framework of those member States with weaker national fisheries legislation.

Following years of campaigning for stronger regulation by ITF and IUF affiliates in New Zealand, and their many efforts to assist abused and exploited foreign crew members, the New Zealand government moved to ban foreign-flagged vessels from fishing in its waters from January 2016. The move, based on the government's concern about the exploitation of crew on those ships—including instances of crew living in conditions of near-slavery—means that all vessels fishing in its waters will have to fly the New Zealand flag, thus giving crew members the right to the country's own labour standards.

In the Philippines, IUF affiliate SENTRO (Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa) has been campaigning for the reinstatement of over 100 workers sacked for forming a union. In addition to this, ITF and IUF worked together to lobby the Philippine and Indonesian governments for a missing fishing vessel and crew to be located and the crew repatriated home to General Santos City. Congressional hearings are ongoing that should resolve the matter and if not, there are international routes available for the workers.

ITF's and IUF's joint goals of increasing union membership and influence in the fishing industry have involved extensive research about existing levels of organization and agreements. This has included field research and workshops to plan areas for actions, and training key union leaders on the industry to provide skills in organizing and

negotiating where there was no previous experience.

Seventeen ITF maritime inspectors were also trained in the content of the ILO Convention No. 188 and supply-chain organizing to support their involvement in increasing representation. Some of them have now been involved in leading training and skills development at both a national and regional level. A full list of the Inspectors and their locations can be found at http://www.itfseafarers.org/find_inspector.cfm.

In Papua New Guinea, the campaign is at a more advanced stage, and organizing efforts have now resulted in thousands of new members for ITF and IUF affiliate Papua New Guinea Maritime and Transport Workers Union, creating great benefits to union influence and progress towards recognition and collective bargaining agreements in five of the eight integrated companies based there. A national increase in the minimum wage in 2014 has resulted in workers now complaining that it is causing detriment as employers have adjusted shift patterns and productivity levels to stop any overall increase in take-home pay for workers, defeating the point of winning a wage rise. This will form part of the ongoing campaign.



Workers of the Citra Mina Group of companies in General Santos, Philippines, campaigning for the reinstatement of sacked union leaders and recognition of their union

In January 2014, ITF offered its support to the families of five fishers who died after the vessel they were on sank. The men—three Egyptian and two Irish nationals—went missing when the Irish-flagged trawler *Tit Bonhomme* sank off the coast of County Cork, Ireland, after a storm. ITF was able to put the families of the Egyptian fishers in touch with its affiliate, the Egyptian General

Crew on board industrial fishing vessels are being actively encouraged to join trade unions that are able to bargain and represent on their behalf.


Seafarers' Union in Egypt, which provided them with assistance at home.

In March 2014, there was a repatriation ceremony for 75 Indonesian crew abandoned off the coast of South Africa on five vessels which were subsequently arrested and the crew charged with illegal fishing. Interventions from ITF inspectors and unions in both the coastal State and the crewing State resulted in the charges being dropped against all crew and them being returned home with a small sum to support their families (donated by an anonymous source) in lieu of non-payment of wages.

Crew on board industrial fishing vessels are being actively encouraged to join trade unions that are able to bargain and represent on their behalf. In many countries there is a difference between industrial and artisanal fishing. To be clear, workers in the industrial part of the industry are the focus of ITF and IUF campaign activity.

The Convention C.188 applies to those workers on board vessels of 24 m and above length, while other maritime instruments will provide security for workers on board vessels of 100 GMT and above. The crew of vessels which are of smaller dimensions and used more for coastal and short-haul fishing should continue to participate in their

local community associations and fishing networks.

Increasing representation in the industry with the relevant governance and decision-making bodies is more and more important as food security continues to be of international concern. Fish as a primary source of protein for over 50 per cent of the planet's population needs to be managed in a sustainable way. This is a goal for the industry to pursue, and trade unions want to make sure workers have the power to not only raise their concerns but to also effect systemic change in the industry, creating a sustainable industry with sustainable jobs. 

For more

www.itfglobal.org/en/news-events/press-releases/2014/june/itf-iuf-press-release-unions-welcome-thai-fisher-slavery-exposé/

Unions Welcome Thai Fishery Slavery Exposé

www.itfglobal.org/en/transport-sectors/fisheries/in-focus/catcher-to-counter/

Catcher to Counter

www.itfglobal.org/en/transport-sectors/fisheries/in-focus/ilo-work-in-fishing-convention/

The ILO Work in Fishing Convention 2007—A Guide for Unions

www.itfseafarers.org/find_inspector.cfm
Find an Inspector or Union