

JOINT STATEMENT OF CSOS WORKING GROUP ON THE SOLIDARITY FOR MIGRANT FISHERS FOR THE 6TH ASEAN-EU POLICY DIALOGUE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Taking the momentum of the 6th ASEAN-EU of ASEAN Policy Dialogue on Human Rights to be held on 15 October 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, civil society representatives in ASEAN conducted a workshop on 6-7 October 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, endorsed and attended by the Chair of ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), H.E. Edmund Bon Tai Soon, Malaysia's Representative to the AICHR.

The workshop was participated by 35 representatives of 20 civil society organizations (collectively called **CSOs Working Group on the Solidarity for Migrant Fishers**), who addressed the vulnerabilities of migrant fishers and consolidated recommendations to ASEAN and EU and their member states for the improved protection of migrant workers in the fishery sector. Prior to the workshop, some members of the Working Group attended The Sustainable Seafood Summit (TSSS) 2025 in Osaka, Japan, engaging seafood business communities, including traders and buyers, to discuss challenges and solutions to achieve sustainable and responsible fisheries supply chain.

The workshop highlights the connection and interplay between human rights situations in the fisheries sectors, especially modern slavery, labour exploitation, and forced labour, and the agenda of sustainability in fisheries governance, including the fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. This approach aligns with the growing global concerns on corporate accountability on human rights and sustainable supply chain, including the EU Forced Labour Regulation and Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) adopted in 2024, as well as the ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers adopted in 2023 and its Guidelines adopted in 2024; in which ASEAN member states recognize the rights of migrant workers in the fisheries sector and commit to their protection in the entire cycle of migration.

CSOs Working Group on the Solidarity for Migrant Fishers raise concerns that ASEAN and EU Member States, many of which are the origin or destination countries of migrant fishers, flag, port, or coastal states of fishing vessels, as well as the market countries of fisheries products, should share responsibilities and cooperate in upholding the rights of migrant fishers by addressing their vulnerabilities and advancing their protection and well-being.

Highlighting the importance of human rights accountability at sea to be promoted and addressed on the 6th ASEAN-EU Policy Dialogue on Human Rights, the Working Group recommends ASEAN and EU Member States to;

- Further commit to the effective implementation and harmonisation of existing international, regional, and national instruments and standards related to migrant fishers' protection with meaningful participation and involvement of workers, the impacted communities, and civil society in policy-making, implementation, and evaluation;

- Uphold and protect the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as the right to freedom of expression, as prerequisites to the meaningful participation of all stakeholders in the agenda of sustainable and responsible fisheries;
- Ensure all migrant fishers are treated non-discriminatory and given equal labour rights and access to social protection without any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference, regardless of their immigration status and other identities;
- Improve labour standards for migrant fishers and ensure decent work on fishing vessels in accordance with international human rights and labour standards, especially the ILO Work in Fishing Convention 2007 (C-188);
- Establish accessible mechanisms for grievance and referral that guarantee the victim protection and rights to remedy, ensuring the legal protection and holding all states concerned accountable, including countries of origin and destination of migrant fishers, as well as flag, port, and coastal states of fishing vessels. This should be complemented with the provision of free and competent legal assistance, mental health, and psychosocial support for migrant fishers;
- All protection measures should employ a victim-centred and rights-based approach following the non-punishment principle (NPP), in which trafficked persons should not be subject to arrest, charge, detention, prosecution, or be penalised or otherwise punished for illegal conduct that they committed as a direct consequence of being trafficked. Alternatives to detention (AtDs) should also be considered as a means to manage migration without depriving individuals of their fundamental rights to liberty to prevent and avoid the adverse physical and psychological effects of deprivation of liberty on people, including persons in a vulnerable situation;
- Establish compulsory and free-of-charge pre-departure and post-arrival orientation training to migrant fishers, regarding workers rights, national labour laws, socio-cultural norms and practices, workplace expectations, good conduct, information about dispute mechanisms, and access to remedies. Dignified return and reintegration programs should be established and information should be available and accessible for all migrant fishers;
- Establish and implement mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) particularly where voluntary measures continue to leave significant gaps in human rights protections in the global fishing industry, combined with capacity building of and resource mobilisations for all stakeholders including small and medium enterprises (SMEs), trade unions, and CSOs to meaningfully engage with the process.
- Enhance traceability and transparency in the fisheries supply chain as key efforts to eliminate the modern slavery at sea and IUU fishing, including by requiring companies to disclose labour-related information and working toward harmonization of key data elements in wild capture fisheries between states and regional fisheries management organizations.

The Working Group calls for solidarity from the wider civil society in ASEAN and EU to support the above recommendations, particularly during the 4th ASEAN-EU Civil Society Organisations' Forum on Human Rights being held on 13-14 October 2025 and its interface meeting with the officials on 15 October 2025 as well as ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) on 14-15 October 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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Consolidated by

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Full joint statement and recommendations can be downloaded [here](#).