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PRESS RELEASE

Civil Society Demands Urgent Actions of ASEAN and EU to End Modern Slavery and Protect Migrant Fishers' Rights

Ahead of the **6th ASEAN-EU Policy Dialogue on Human Rights**, set to take place on **15 October 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**, a coalition of civil society organizations (CSOs) has issued a joint statement calling on ASEAN and EU Member States to strengthen the protection, rights, and welfare of migrant fishers within and originating from Southeast Asia. This statement urges the ASEAN and EU officials to address the rampant human rights abuses and modern slavery plaguing the fisheries sector, which hugely contributes to the economies and food security of both regional blocs.

The CSOs Working Group on the Solidarity for Migrant Fishers, consisting of 35 representatives from 20 organizations, convened a workshop on 6–7 October 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, endorsed and attended by **H.E. Edmund Bon Tai Soon**, Malaysia's Representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the current Chair of AICHR. The joint statement released is one of the workshop's outputs, built upon the Working Group members' expertise on human rights, labour migration, modern slavery and trafficking in persons, and ocean governance and sustainability. It also benefited from insights gained from the **Sustainable Seafood Summit (TSSS) 2025** held on 1-2 October 2025 in Osaka, Japan, where members of the Working Group engaged with seafood industry stakeholders to explore solutions for ethical and sustainable fisheries.

[Human Rights and Sustainability in Fisheries Governance]

The Working Group emphasized the urgent need to address the interconnected challenges of **modern slavery, forced labour, and human rights abuses in the fisheries sector**. These issues, the group stated, are deeply tied to **global sustainable development goals and responsible business and supply chain management**.

Their recommendations align with recent regional and international developments, including the ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers (2023) and its

Guidelines (2024), as well as the EU Forced Labour Regulation, and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) adopted in 2024.

[Key Recommendations to ASEAN and EU Member States]

The Working Group urged ASEAN and EU governments to take the following actions:

- **Implement and harmonize international labour and human rights standards**, ensure meaningful participation of workers, affected communities, and civil society, and **uphold freedom of association, collective bargaining, and expression** as essential to sustainable and fair fisheries governance.
- **Guarantee equal labour rights and social protection** for all migrant fishers, regardless of immigration status or identity and **enforce decent working conditions** in line with the **ILO Work in Fishing Convention (C-188)**.
- **Provide accessible grievance mechanisms and victim-centred remedies**, including legal assistance and psychosocial support, by **applying the Non-Punishment Principle (NPP)** to ensure trafficked persons are not criminalized.
- **Establish comprehensive pre-departure and post-arrival training**, along with dignified return and reintegration programs.
- **Mandate Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD)** across the fishing industry, while ensuring capacity building for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and CSOs, and **enhance traceability and transparency** in the fisheries supply chain to combat modern slavery and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

[A Call for Solidarity]

The Working Group also called for solidarity from civil society in ASEAN and the EU to advance these recommendations during the [4th ASEAN-EU Civil Society Organisations' Forum on Human Rights \(13–14 October 2025\)](#) and the **ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) (14–15 October 2025)** in Kuala Lumpur.

About the Joint Statement & Contacts

The joint statement by the Working Group is consolidated by **Better Engagement Between East and Southeast Asia (BEBESEA)**, **Human Rights Working Group (HRWG)**, and **Indonesia Ocean Justice Initiative (IOJI)**. It is endorsed by 16 other civil society organisations, including sea-based workers' unions, from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, the UK and Vietnam.

The full joint statement can be accessed at [BEBESEA's website](#) or [downloaded here](#).

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