

NTS Bulletin May 2016**Labour Exploitation in the Fishing Industry**

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Fish and seafood are an important source of protein and micronutrients vital for good health. In 2011, fish consumption per capita was estimated to be at 18.9kg globally, estimated to account for 16.7% of total animal protein consumption. As a source for cheap and abundant seafood, the ASEAN regions plays a key role in global fish production – Indonesia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia are amongst the top 18 major fish exporters of the world. Rising global demand for fish from Southeast Asia has resulted in an increase in fish production. While profitable, the labour intensive work is unappealing and the industry suffers from labour shortage. As such, some in the industry has turned to human trafficking to fill the labour gap. Central to the controversy is the multi-billion dollar Thai fishing industry, where a 2015 exposé by the Associate Press uncovered workers who are trafficked or coerced into service and work under the conditions of modern slavery.

Scope of the problem

There are 57,141 registered fishing boats in Thailand. However, as monitoring and control regulations are lax, the actual number may be more. CNN reports that 80% of the 145,000 fishery workers in Thailand are migrant workers. There are an estimated additional 200,000 unregistered workers on fishing vessels. Much of the forced labour in the Thai fishing industry is comprised of illegal migrants from Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Indonesia. Interviews with those who managed to escaped revealed that some are drugged and kidnapped, while many are tricked by traffickers into slavery – signing up for jobs such as construction work or legitimate fishing jobs but ending up performing forced labour on fishing vessels. The US Department of State 2014 Trafficking in Persons report indicated that amongst the trafficked are also Rohingya Muslims refugees from Myanmar.

These fishermen work long hours – as much as 20 hours a day for 7 days a week. They remain isolated at sea for years, receiving little payment and minimal sustenance. Identity cards of workers (if any) are held by employers to prevent escapes. Workers are subjected to threats and beatings. Eyewitness accounts have revealed murders and bodies thrown overboard. Interviewees have also reported the use of drugs to keep them compliant. This vulnerable population are also subject to health risks. Studies have shown a high prevalence of HIV and Hepatitis C infections amongst Southeast Asian fishermen. This presents huge human security implications for the ASEAN region.

Regulation efforts

Due to the efforts of NGOs and journalists, the issue of labour exploitation in Thailand's fishing industry have recently received more attention by the international community. The European Union had launched an investigation into the Thai seafood industry in 2015 and is still in the process of deciding whether or not to impose a ban on Thai seafood imports. However, regulating illegal fishing remains difficult. Thai authorities have produced detailed plans to increase regulation of their fishing industry, but EU delegates have found them wanting in addressing illegal labour practices. While Thailand has laws against human trafficking, there is lack of transparency and clarity in the enforcement of those laws. Moreover, the transnational nature of illegal fishing makes it difficult for any one country to regulate.

Moving forward to an integrated ASEAN approach

For this issue to be successfully addressed, more collaborative effort is required from ASEAN states to police the region's waters and enforce anti-trafficking laws. In 2015, ASEAN member states have signed the Convention against Trafficking in Persons, ratifying their commitment to secure justice and for trafficking victims. Better coordination and cooperation amongst government agencies within the ASEAN region would allow more comprehensive policing of waters, along with more focus on labour exploitation and slavery.

Core Readings:

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- Justin Worland, The mixed fate of nuclear power 30 years after Chernobyl, Time, 26 April 2016.
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- Beth Day Romulo, Renewable energy is a global success, Manila Bulletin, 4 May 2016.
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- Julius Cesar I. Trajano, Cheaper fossil fuels: The relevance of nuclear energy, RSIS Commentaries, 9 May 2016.

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- Thomas Raines and Shane Tomlinson, 2016, Europe's energy union: Foreign policy implications for energy security, climate and competitiveness, London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs Chatham House.

Events and Announcements

- Singapore International Energy Week Energy Insights, 23 May 2016, Shanghai, China.
- 7th Annual Nuclear Decommissioning Conference Europe, 31 May-1 June 2016, Manchester, UK.

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News & Commentaries

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News & Commentaries

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- AFP and Flora Drury, Rio Olympics could spark 'a full-blown global health disaster' if just a handful of visitors are infected with Zika and bring it back to their home countries, warns health expert, Mail Online, 11 May 2016
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Events & Announcements

- Education and Healthcare Security Forum, 17-18 October 2016, Boston, Massachusetts
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News & Commentaries

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- International Peace Research Association (IPRA), General call for papers: 26th IPRA general conference on agenda for peace and development, 27 November-1 December 2016, Sierra Leone, Africa.
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Events & Announcements

- The 4th Session of the Working Group on Firearms, 18-19 May 2016, Vienna, Austria.
- 6th Annual Info Security Singapore Conference, 24 May 2016, Singapore, Singapore.

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- Andrew Schroeder and Patrick Meier, Automation for the people: Opportunities and challenges of humanitarian robotics, Humanitarian Practice Network, 1 April 2016.
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Events & Announcements

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