

INTERVENTION BY ILO DIRECTOR-GENERAL GUY RYDER ON « SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES »

AT « OUR OCEAN » CONFERENCE – MALTA, 6/10/2017

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The International Labour Organization is pleased to have the opportunity to take part in this conference session as it focuses particularly on various themes of the blue economy.

Let me begin by recalling that more than 350 million people in the world earn their living at sea or from the sea. That includes 200 million in maritime fisheries; 1.5 million are maritime seafarers.

The first point I want to make is that the future of these people, the future of their communities is intimately bound up with the future of the oceans themselves and of fish. If we take seriously the links between the environmental, the economic and the social dimensions of sustainable development, and the inter-related nature of all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals, then it follows that ensuring that conditions of ocean-related work are decent is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of fisheries and of our oceans themselves.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many fishing operations do provide decent work. But there are still significant and sometimes grave decent work deficits in the sector. They become all the more serious and all the more dangerous when there are so many illicit and illegal operators on our oceans. These deficits can range from long working hours and hazardous working conditions at one end of the scale to abandonment, child labour, forced labour and trafficking at the other end. These violations of fundamental labour rights are not only detrimental to the fishers who are their victims but they also damage the reputation of the whole of the fishing sector, despite its indispensable contribution to food security.

So with these challenges in mind I would like to present to you very quickly the four commitments of the ILO at this Conference.

The ILO as perhaps you know is a standards-based organization. We set and we supervise the international labour conventions that govern work around the world. And I want to highlight our commitments in respect of two of those standards which are particularly relevant to sustainable fisheries.

The Work in Fishing Convention will come into force next month. This convention was adopted as long ago as 2007 and will now become effective, and it sets the basic standards of decent work in the fishing industry. Our commitment is to work to make this convention one that provides effective protection for all of the people who work in this sector. We have a long way to go, but with our friends in the FAO and with your help, we believe that we can do that.

The second commitment relates to another key ILO convention, the 2006 Maritime Labour Convention. This is a unique instrument. It is the international labour code for the oceans, the seafarers' bill of rights. It has received, from its adoption just over ten years ago, sufficient ratifications that it now covers 90% of the world's shipping fleet. Our task and our commitment is to make sure that those ratifications are so supervised that we can make sure that there will be - and we are moving towards - universal application of that convention.

The third commitment relates to a particular category of people engaged in fisheries who are amongst the most vulnerable of those who work in it. I refer to migrant fishers, people who work on board vessels flying the flag of a state which is not the state of the fishers' national or permanent

residence. As I say, these are often situations leaving workers open to serious abuse, notably in processes of recruitment and placing of workers on vessels.

At a meeting convened in Geneva just last month we have set out a plan of action to ensure more effective promotion of protection of those workers. That will involve the ILO, and its own instruments being applied, but our meeting also recognized the need for us to work with the FAO and with the International Maritime Organization concerning issues such as vessel safety, training of fishers and elimination of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing through port state measures.

My last commitment relates to a matter which has been referred to by a number of speakers already. It seems to us a minimum commitment for anybody who wants to look to a satisfactory future for our oceans that we make them oceans free of modern slavery. Today 1.8 million people of the 25 million victims of forced labour in the world work in fisheries and agriculture. The ILO's commitment is to work in practical ways to eliminate these abominations from our oceans. In that respect the ILO's global action programme against forced labour and trafficking of fishers at sea as well as the Ship to Shore rights project supported by the European Commission will be funded and scaled up. This is a commitment that we trust the ILO makes not on its own, not as a single organization, but in the name of the international community in its entirety. I hope you will join with us.

Thank you very much.