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STRENGTHENING COLLECTIVE EFFORTS TO COMBAT ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED (IUU) FISHING AND LABOR RIGHTS ABUSE

IUU fishing constitutes one of the most serious threats to the sustainability of fisheries and to marine biodiversity and ecosystems. It directly contributes to overfishing, undermines coastal communities and food security, and creates unfair competition for fishers operating legally, stealing income of billions of dollars from the developing world. It can also be associated with human, drugs, and weapons trafficking as well as labor and human rights abuses in the seafood sector. The devastating environmental and human consequences of IUU fishing disproportionately affect coastal communities in low-income countries who rely on fisheries for their livelihood and subsistence, and vulnerable workers and migrant populations working in the fisheries sector.

Combating IUU fishing requires addressing the persistent challenge of flags of non-compliance, which allow illicit operators to evade regulations due to lax oversight. By ensuring that flag States uphold their responsibilities and by enforcing stricter transparency measures, the international community can close loopholes that facilitate illegal activities at sea. Holding perpetrators accountable is further impeded by the opaque nature of the fishing industry and its associated supply chains. In particular, the lack of beneficial ownership transparency in the fishing sector hinders efforts to track financial profits and hold those who ultimately control and benefit the most from IUU fishing operations accountable for their actions.

Given its transboundary and global nature, IUU fishing, and the abuses associated with it, are more effectively prevented through international cooperation. As such, the EU, Japan, and the U.S., as the largest markets for imported seafood in the world and some of the most influential flag States, have a responsibility to ensure the adoption, implementation and promotion of effective tools to combat IUU fishing and labor abuses in the seafood sector.

This requires enhanced cooperation to promote transparency in fisheries governance, on-the-water monitoring (including Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) or Automatic Identification System (AIS), and electronic monitoring (EM) and/or human observers, with safeguards for workers), seafood traceability systems that track and trace seafood from boat to plate, sufficient enforcement capabilities and coordinated action, and mechanisms that enable regional port, coastal and flag State cooperation, including capacity building where needed.

Deliberate collaboration and the exchange of real-time information will also greatly increase the effectiveness and impact of applying effective port State measures and inspections at the point of landing to deter illicit activities and incentivize the adoption of best practices globally. Therefore, full implementation of the Food and Agriculture Organization's Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA), as the first and only binding international agreement to specifically target IUU fishing, is of particular importance. To this end, the goals for increased market and flag State cooperation should include the requirement to:

1. Strengthen import controls to prevent market access of seafood produced through IUU fishing and/or forced labor

- 1.1. Ensure the key data elements meet minimum standards and harmonize information requirements between the different schemes to the most robust standards.
- 1.2. Ensure information collected at the point of catch or harvest is accurate and verifiable by using on-the-water monitoring tools such as VMS and/or AIS and EM that include safeguards to protect workers.
- 1.3. Improve verification, through for example the adoption of electronic fisheries information systems for vessel tracking, monitoring, catch reporting, and/or validation of catch documents and promote digitization of traceability schemes.
- 1.4. Require reporting of chain-of-custody and any accompanying documentation demonstrating legality (i.e. license and registration information).
- 1.5. Expand the scope of import control schemes to apply to all imported seafood products (including fresh, frozen, processed and aquaculture products).
- 1.6. Share intelligence and information collected from respective import control programs – especially around high-risk products – to complement enforcement efforts.
- 1.7. Adopt effective penalties and coordinate sanctions to ensure that neither individuals or companies are benefiting from these types of IUU fishing and labor activities, regardless of whether products derived from those practices enter the EU, Japan, or U.S. market.

2. Improve coordination, sharing of information and diplomatic engagement with countries identified for IUU fishing

- 2.1. Coordinate on the action against countries engaged in systematic IUU fishing and/or labor rights abuses through better trilateral arrangements and/or through existing frameworks, such as the relevant PSMA working groups, or the ad hoc Joint Working Group on IUU Fishing and Related Matters. This should also include regular operational-level meetings (e.g. annually) between the three governments where information is shared on investigations, enforcement actions (including charges brought and concluded), intelligence (including through the analysis of data from the domestic import control schemes), trends of potential mutual interest, convictions, and sanctions.
- 2.2. Initiate a system to exchange information between the EU, Japan, and U.S. on suspected or confirmed IUU fishing activities and labor rights allegations or cases, support the recommendation by the Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels (Global Record) working group for the FAO Secretariat to explore the feasibility of obtaining and sharing beneficial ownership information and the technical requirements and benefits of adding a crew module to the Global Record as well as fully engage with existing systems such as FAO's Global Information Exchange System (GIES), to ensure real time data exchange.
- 2.3. Coordinate at regional and international fora (e.g., in Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), international governmental organizations) to strengthen monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) measures and their enforcement, including through collaborative high seas boarding and inspection schemes, as well as measures to closely monitor at-sea transshipments or banning the practice where adequate monitoring is insufficient.
- 2.4. Identify and share any new developments in patterns of IUU fishing and forced labor that could lead to more effective enforcement, including the role that so-called 'flag-of-convenience' and processing countries play in facilitating violations.
- 2.5. Join the IUU Fishing Action Alliance, endorse the IUU Fishing Action Alliance Pledge and encourage other countries to do so as well.

3. Improve coordination and engagement with countries across the seafood supply chain to strengthen compliance and oversight

- 3.1. Support and coordinate efforts, including through foreign aid, to build in-country capacity and resources to combat IUU fishing and fishing-related labor and human rights abuses through, for example, improved MCS and inspection systems, including electronic monitoring, in source countries/fisheries.
- 3.2. Effectively implement the PSMA, and/or agree to ratify other relevant international instruments, if not done so already such as the ILO C188 – Work in Fishing Convention, the IMO Cape Town Agreement on Fishing Vessel Safety (not in force), The Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas (The Compliance Agreement) the UN BBNJ High Seas Treaty, the WTO Fishing Subsidies Agreement, and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to support the eradication of IUU fishing and labour abuses onboard fishing vessels and encourage and support other countries, especially developing States to do the same.
- 3.3. Promote regulatory adoption and compliance in RFMOs. Specifically, ensuring that the port State conservation and management measures (CMMs) are mandatory and aligned with the PSMA and CMMs include the adoption of electronic monitoring programs to strengthen compliance and improve management of fishing activities.
- 3.4. Coordinate deployment of technical expertise to ensure the necessary mechanisms are in place to deliver sustainable fisheries and enable labor management schemes to succeed in order to benefit workers and communities globally.

4. Implement and promote the adoption of tools to increase transparency

- 4.1. Endorse and promote the principles of the Global Charter for Fisheries Transparency, adopt and implement the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FITI) Standard.
- 4.2. Fully utilise the FAO Global Record by uploading comprehensive vessel licensing, registration and ownership information, improving the data and frequency of updates, and encouraging other countries to follow suit.

- 4.3. Enhance overall fishing activity transparency by publishing comprehensive and up-to-date information of fishing subsidies, access agreements and imposed sanctions, and encourage other countries to follow suit.
- 4.4. Ensure mandatory and continuous use of AIS and VMS for flagged fishing vessels and those engaged in fishing-related activities, such as transshipment, to improve safety and vessel tracking.
- 4.5. Require public information on the ultimate beneficial owner of vessels and processing facilities to help identify the real beneficiaries of illicit activities to facilitate enforcement and deter infractions.
- 4.6. Increase observer coverage (EM and/or human observers) to 100% of industrial fishing vessels by 2030, and advocate for 100% observer coverage requirement in tuna RFMOs.
- 4.7. Require the collection of information on incidents at sea at a national and/or regional level and support the set-up of an international repository, particularly for fisher mortality cases as requested by Members at the thirty-sixth session of the Committee on Fisheries and followed up at the Fourth FAO, IMO, ILO ad hoc working group in 2024.

5. Develop effective tools to combat the use of forced labor

- 5.1. Promote the adoption of safety, security, and well-being measures for all persons working across the fishing industry, including fishery observers, that comply with international core human and labor rights standards.
- 5.2. Support workers' right to freedom of association and right to collective bargaining and, more specifically, to support migrant fishers' unions in line with the requirements of the ILO C188.
- 5.3. Adopt tools and measures that enable fisheries managers to have 'eyes on the water' and assess labor standards onboard vessels, i.e. through electronic monitoring and/or human observers.
- 5.4. Strengthen and/or establish import prohibitions for products captured, created with or linked to forced labor. Establish mechanisms to prevent transshipment or export/re-export to third countries of such products; and work toward mutual recognition of forced labor determinations.

EU IUU FISHING COALITION





UNITED STATES
IUU Fishing & Labor Rights
COALITION

Our members include:

