

Slipping Through the Net: IUU Fishing and Exploited Fishers in Southeast Asia

3 May 2019, Friday, 3.30pm– 5pm
National University of Singapore, Bukit Timah Campus
469 Bukit Timah Road, Block B, Level 4, Seminar Room 4-3, Singapore 259756

Admission is free. To register, please click here.

According to estimates of the International Labour Organization, on any given day in 2016, 16 million people around the world are in forced labour in the private sector. Of these, around 11 per cent worked in fishing and agriculture. Globally, it is estimated that the fisheries and aquaculture sectors directly and indirectly support the livelihoods of 12 per cent of the world's population.

The labour of fishers contributes directly to our food security. Global fisheries production has continued to grow with per capita consumption rising from an average of 15.9 to 20.1 kg, as human populations also increased between 2000 and 2014. The world trade in fish and fisheries products have also grown steadily.

Fishing is recognised as a hazardous occupation, with capture fisheries having among the highest incidences of occupational injuries and fatalities. Migrant fishers face additional vulnerabilities and are at risk of human trafficking for forced labour, as media reports over the last few years have highlighted.

Yet, the protection of fishers and migrant fishers remains a significant challenge. The often transnational nature of work in fishing, particularly for migrant fishers working on vessels not flagged to their own countries, means that fishers often fall into legal, policy and enforcement gaps. Moreover, the traditional analytical framework for human trafficking does not fit easily with the jurisdictional complexities of human trafficking in fisheries.

The ILO-incubated Southeast Asian Forum to End Human Trafficking and Forced Labour in Fisheries (the SEA Forum for Fishers) is a multi-stakeholder initiative to address these issues. The seminar will describe the jurisdictional challenges around enforcing labour protections and prevention of human trafficking in fisheries, and its relationship to IUU fishing, and current opportunities and barriers to improving work conditions for fishers and ensuring sustainability in the fisheries of Southeast Asia.

Mi Zhou is a Chief Technical Advisor at the International Labour Organization (ILO), a specialised agency of the UN, and heads the SEA Fisheries Project based in Jakarta. The project has incubated the SEA Forum for Fishers, an initiative aimed to strengthen regional coordination to combat human trafficking for forced labour in fisheries in Southeast Asia.

She specialises in migration and labour rights and has worked on a variety of labour migration, wage and global supply chain projects with the ILO in the Philippines, Pakistan and Ethiopia. She also has experience working with UNHCR and UNODC.

Prior to joining the ILO, she was a Senior Lecturer in the law department at the University of Hong Kong. She has degrees in law, international relations, and literature from the University of New South Wales in Australia, and a PhD from the University of Cambridge.

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