

Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People

AOS International Fishing Committee Meeting

(Rome, 18th February 2009)

Report

The proceedings opened with morning prayer led by Fr. Samuel Fonseca.

The meeting was chaired by Archbishop Marchetto, Secretary of the Pontifical Council, who gave his introductory address, welcoming Mr. Grimur Valdimarsson, Director of the Fish Products and Industrial Division of FAO and Mr. Jon Whitlow, Secretary of the ITF Seafarers Section in charge of Fisheries. In spite of their hectic schedule, they were able to find time to attend and share their experiences and observations. Then Archbishop Marchetto proceeded to give a global outlook of the problems affecting the fishing industry around the world and what AOS could do. First he invited AOS to make an extra effort to create avenues for single fisher owners to talk among themselves and that AOS should invite groups of fishers to Centres and parishes and to share their concerns and become pastorally organized. Secondly, AOS should help to empower fishers through different forms of education so that they can stand up for their rights and advocate for the adoption and implementation of FAO/IMO instruments and in particular the latest Work on Fishing Convention (188). Thirdly, AOS with its extensive network of Centers around the world and grassroots contacts, should be a reliable source of information especially in regard to the welfare of fishers. This information/data must be made available to all the different organizations and NGO's interested in the welfare and wellbeing of fishers.

Mr. Valdimarsson shared some facts about the increase number of hungry and malnourished people in the world, on food prices and on agricultural products. There is an interaction between all of these. In fact, half of the fish used for food comes from aquaculture and even if fish play a small part on the food picture, consumption is higher than ever. FAO has been helping small scale fishers for many years bringing together responsible fisheries and social development. An interesting note seems to be a connection between piracy and Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Most probably many of these pirates before were practicing IUU fishing but now after a more strict implementation of regulations and more control on the origin of the catch they have had to abandon the IUU fishing practice and they turn to piracy in order to make quick and easy money. At the end he announced the important initiative of establishing a Global Record of Fishing Vessels and repeated that the fishing industry is one of the most dangerous in the world with 24,000 people being killed every year.

Mr. Withlow talked about the industrialization of the fishing activities not only in developed countries but also in developing countries where artisanal fishers now are becoming mechanized. He added that in the last few years, in some European countries, the employment of migrant fishers from developing countries has increased. Talking about the global financial crisis, he mentioned that it might bring some benefit to the maritime world because of the new emerging policy against "tax heaven" countries, which might affect especially the flags of convenience. Finally, he mentioned the many abuses committed on the fishing industries and the lack of clear data and evidence to prove them. Lastly he invited AOS with its network to assist ITF in gathering information and data on exploitation in the fishing world by collecting statements, pictures, copies of contract, etc. and to pass them on to ITF.

AOS commitment to the Fishing sector was also noted through the reports on fishing done by the Regional Coordinators. Most national AOS are already engaged in pastoral work with fishing communities.

Many Chaplains do care for fishing communities in their parishes; religious services are often offered in the port and children of fishers attend parochial schools. The situation unfortunately is still bleak. Arrests and detention continue, boats and nets are confiscated all over the world and fishers keep knocking at the doors of AOS Centres to ask for assistance and protection from exploitation and abuses.

It is important for AOS to remember the consensus document of the Global Conference on Small-scale Fisheries (officially titled “Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries: Bringing Together Responsible Fisheries and Social Development”, and abbreviated as 4SSF), co-organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations FAO and the Department of Fisheries, Thailand, from 13 to 17 October 2008, at Bangkok.

I. Securing Fishing Rights:

- Access rights of small-scale and indigenous fishing.
- Prohibit industrial fishing in inshore waters.
- Prevent the privatization of fisheries resources.
- Prevent the displacement of fishing communities.
- Reject industrial aquaculture.

II. Securing post-harvest Rights

- Protect access of women of fishing communities.
- Ensure that trade promotes human development.
- Sustainability of fisheries.
- Effectively involve fishing communities in negotiations.
- Identify social and ecological fisheries.

III. Securing Human Rights

- Cultural identities, dignity and traditional fishing rights of fishing.
- Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIPS).
- Basic services such as safe drinking water, education, sanitation, health.
- Implement the ILO Work on Fishing Convention 2007.
- Eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.

At the end of the *AOS Fishing Committee Meeting*, H.E. Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, President of the Pontifical Council, expressed his gratitude to the participants, pointing out that, being born near the sea, he knows the problems and challenges of the people of the sea. He was pleased to announce the reopening, in his native city (Salerno), of the “Stella Maris”.

In conclusion, Cardinal Martino stressed the importance and necessity of the website which must be a “chatting point” for us and among us, to share our concerns and achievements.