

An overview of assistance and rescue given to fishing workers in Indonesia

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An overview of situation relating to the fishing workers based in Ambon and Benjina Islands, Indonesia

Thai fishing vessels fish overseas, particularly in Indonesia including Northern Indonesia and Southern Indonesia. The number of overseas fishing vessels from 1965 until 2006 has increased by 1,000-1,500. Therefore, overseas fishing has been practiced for over half a century and a number of fishing workers have been held captive and subject to forced-slavery; they are not allowed to return home and face brutal physical abuse, particularly victims of human trafficking lingering in various islands. Overall, many of them have been lured into the work and have never been brought back. Many have to stay on board in the fishing vessels for at least six years in a row. Even when the vessels are brought back for maintenance, the workers continue to stay there and work in other fishing vessels. Basically, they are not allowed to returned home and have been issued with fake ID documents (forfeited Seaman Book, i.e., being identified as Cambodian, even though they are Thai, vice versa, being identified as Burmese, even though they are Thai, etc). This makes it difficult to verify the identities of the people.

Outreach work to search and rescue overseas fishing workers has commenced in August 2014. Awareness raising has been made along with effort to rescue fishing workers held captive in various islands including Benjina, Ambon and Tuan. Collaboration and information sharing has been made among AP News and TV3 (Thailand) coordinated by LPN which has been giving assistance to fishing workers regardless of their nationalities including Thai, Lao and Cambodian. Many of them have been rescued and repatriated to their countries of origin.

Rescue operation during May-June 2015

Fishing workers in hiding (means workers stranded in various islands. The number has reached 100-300 in each island. They are difficult to reach since they stay in hiding and live off food in the wild. LPN has been coordinating with embassies from Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia in Indonesia to bring them back to their respective countries. The numbers of victims rescued and repatriated are as follows;

Table: Victims rescued and repatriated in May-June 2015

No.	Nationality	Island/Indonesia	Number (person)
1	Lao	Ambon	4
2	Cambodia	Ambon	4
3	Myanmar	Ambon	21
4	Thailand	Ambon /Benjina	40
	Total		69

At least 500 fishing workers have approached us for help, but we have not had access to them including those in Benjina Island (200), Ambon Island (150), Tuan (50), Posinas, Kalimantan (100), Samlucky (30). More field trips are needed to collect more information.

Three of the workers died on Benjina Island and their bodies have been retrieved for funeral services while their identities have to be verified using DNA testing. Coordination is being made with the local consulate for further assistance and contact has been made with their relatives. All the fishing workers are Thai.

Repatriation assisted by LPN and its procedure

1. Identify fishing workers in distress including those stranded on various islands and escaping workers, mentally-ill workers, wandering workers and those working in remote forests as well as fishing workers who have become victims of human trafficking
2. Interview and record their profile based on the standard form used by consulates, take their photo
3. Coordinate with embassies from Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar based in Jakarta
4. Coordinate with Immigration officers to process the repatriation (while pending the coordination for repatriation, LPN shall provide for the affected workers' safety, basic necessities (food, medicine) and coordinate with immigration officers on the Ambon Island based properly on human rights principles
5. The embassies issue temporary passports and air-tickets purchased
6. Fix the departure date with their families
7. Coordinate and encourage the families to contact and give information to the Damrong Tham Center (In some cases whereby the relatives seek help from within the countries of origin and could produce Seaman Books to prove the identities of fishing workers who have become victims of human trafficking)

Problems and challenges to assist the repatriation to countries of origin

1. A lack of safety for the fishing crew, they can be tracked down and forced to return to the fishing vessels again by the fishing operators. They could also be subject to physical abuse committed by local people, their lack of language skill, their being subject to physical abuse, their being beaten and left to starve. Some died of being bitten by wild animals or Malaria in the jungle and some who are so stressful and freak out. Effort is needed to accelerate the process to seek assistance to bring them home safely. Delay in assistance has cost lives, including the three deaths who have perished prior to the arrival of assistance.

2. Delay in document acquisition and coordination with fishing workers being victims of human trafficking and forced slavery. Some could not produce their ID cards since they had been brought here when they were 12-14 years. Sometimes, the delay could be attributed to complicated procedure for the repatriation and nationally testing.
3. Most fishing workers have been issued with fake documents which could not be used to identify themselves and seek help. Some have lost contact with their families for over ten years, or their families have moved somewhere and could not be reached.
4. Some fishing workers were unable to give exact detail of their home address since they had been subject to brutal treatment until they had lost their mind.
5. No specific organizations have been established to conduct the search and rescue in the area.
6. No interpreter to help with communication when the fishing crew have become victims and were in need of help to return to their countries of origin.
7. Many islands are located remotely and no help can be directly acquired from Jakarta. Some have been subjected to physical abuse and resold to another boat.
8. Some fishing workers have been held captive and kidnapped to prevent them from returning to their countries for a long time. The entrepreneurs have quitted the industry and refused to take responsibility over the workers claiming they were not their workers.

Assistance given for repatriation of fishing workers to countries of origin (the case of Thai fishing crew)

1. Coordinate with families asking them to receive the workers at the airport if they have suffered from mental illness or if they have become victims since young. Also, coordination has been made with families requesting for help from LPN to search and rescue the workers.
2. Explain and help the families to come to terms with the situations befalling the workers in the beginning and their need to get adapted, i.e., finding it hard to sleep, hallucination, being constantly terrified, and being highly alcoholic. Coordination has been made for them to receive medical and psychological treatment. If the families happened to be so destitute and unable to take care of the fishing workers, then LPN would intervene and provide temporary shelter.
3. Outreach work to evaluate the families and to elicit help needed for legal action. The SR Law Firm has been helping to represent three fishing workers who were held captive illegally on Benjina Island and had been neglected for 5-10 years, to pursue both criminal and civil suits.
4. Coordinate to demand payment of wages, welfare and labour protection as well as to initiate legal action in collaboration with the Department of Special

Investigation (DSI) and the National Operation Center on Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking (NOCHT) to provide legal aid and protection to the affected workers

5. Establish a network of fishing workers to elicit information regarding working condition in the fishing vessels and to fundraise to help their fellow fishing workers who are still unable to return to their countries of origin. The fishing workers has made a contribution of 30,000 baht to the fund for legal aid, medical treatment for their fellow workers who suffer mental illness.
6. Safe reintegration into their community, coordinate with local agencies at the district and village levels, particularly Damrong Tham Center to help the fishing workers apply for ID cards
7. Organize three public forums to raise social awareness in collaboration with the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, Chulalongkorn University regarding the situation of fishing workers in Indonesia
8. Submit three letters of petition to the government asking them to accelerate effort to provide help to the fishing workers stranded in various islands
9. Coordinate with the countries of origin sending them information and fixing the date for repatriation and arranging with the families of the victims

Assistance to help the fishing crew to return to their countries of origin (the case of fishing workers from Laos and Cambodia)

1. Coordinate with their families and send information to country missions
2. Coordinate with foreign media and advocate assistance for migrant workers from neighboring countries
3. Coordinate with networks of NGO in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia to contact the workers' families
4. Provide basic necessities and temporary shelter in Indonesia prior to assisting them to report themselves to the immigration officers
5. Coordinate to demand unpaid wages