



The Special Report on Operations saving workers in fishing boats from Indonesia

Seafarers Action Center (SAC)

Labor Rights Promotion Network Foundation (LPN)

Patima Tangprachyakul

21/10/2015

Background: An overview of the situation of fishing workers based in Ambon and Benjina Islands, Indonesia

Thai fishing vessels have been operating in international waters, especially off the Indonesian coasts from 1965 onward. In 2006, the numbers of these vessels have increased to around 1500. The overseas fisheries have been practiced for 50 years have lead to forced fishing labors, slaved labors, detention and severe physical abuses of the fishing workers, especially those who were victimized by the human trafficking syndicates. These workers have either been held working in the ocean over the long period of times or left stranded in small islands in Indonesia. The general problems include labors being tricked into working in the boats for the minimum of six years at least, labors could not return to their homes once they are at sea, fraudulent documentation (seaman books), leading to the inability to identify the nationalities and identities of these workers.

The LPN has started its fieldwork to assist the fishing workers in overseas fisheries since August 2014. We have worked closely with the media such as AP and channel 3 (Thailand) to uncover the truths about these fishing workers in Benjina, Ambon and Tual Islands. The LPN foundation has helped all workers from all nationalities (Thais, Burmese, Laotians, and Cambodians) so that they can return homes.

The Labor Rights Promotion Network (LPN) Foundation was founded to promote the labor's quality of life. These labors include Thais, Burmese, Laotians, and Cambodians since 2004. Our work is to fight against child labor, human trafficking through modern slavery.

In 2006, the LPN Foundation was asked for assistance by the 66 fishermen from *Prapat Navee* boat. Out of the sixty-six victims, 39 fishermen (Thais and Burmese) passed away on the course of returning to their motherlands from Indonesian water, some were seriously ill and needed treatment and care. All of the fishermen did not get any payment from their work nor compensation.

In 2007, the LPN Foundation was asked for assistance by the Thai and Burmese fishermen who went fishing in the Somalian water. The Foundation was able to coordinate and send one corpse and one 14-year-old laborer who had been detained back to Thailand.

During 2006 to 2014, the LPN Foundation has got 128 complaints about fishermen leaving from Thailand to work in Indonesian water. Out of the total number, there were 39 deaths and 2 handicapped injuries. Those who made it out alive did not get any payment from their work nor the care from their employers at all.

The above are the rationales of the operations to save Thai fishermen in Indonesia.

The LPN Foundation's Findings from the field survey in Indonesia

1. The staff found the detention of labor inland for human trafficking to work in fishing industry. We had seen agents and some groups claiming to be governmental staff who arrested and detained the migrant workers from Myanmar and Cambodia and sold them to the agents to work in the Thai fishing boats. The detention areas included the blue house, the shrimp farm, the rental room in the coconut orchard, the fruit orchard in the areas of Samut Sakorn, Samut Prakan, and Samut Songkram.
2. The staff learned that many boys (average age of 12) from Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodian and Laos were trafficked to work in the fishing boats and had gone missing. Some workers were sold to the agents by people who claimed to be governmental officials to the fishing boats.
3. The staff also found that there were more than 2000 Burmese workers who were sold to the fishing boats illegally, they would carry fraudulent seamen books as the Thai workers. We have found some cases who had not returned home for more than 22 years.
4. The staff found out there were more than 500 Thais who were drugged and forced into the boats. Some came back delirious and suicidal. The foundation also found more than 100 workers losing limbs and sights from work hazard, some were so seriously malnourished that it caused hand and foot spasm and memory losses.
5. The LPN found that more than 70% of the fishermen working in Indonesia did not receive fair wages and payment, most of them had to slave themselves to make their supervisors satisfied.
6. The staff learned that most workers could not return home because they did not have any document or identity papers as the employers usually kept their papers with the captains of the boats they worked on. This included the identity fraud done by the Thai and Indonesian fishing companies, patroned by the corruption system to change the nationalities of the workers, e.g. from Thai to Cambodian, from Cambodian to Thai, Burmese to Thai, in order to deny the relations between employers and employees.
7. The staff learned that there were many abuses and tortures on the boat, these abuses included face slapping, scalding with hot water, beating with the iron pipe, hitting with

the fish, forcing the workers to swim till they drown, order to kill those who tried to defy the orders.

8. The staff were told that some workers could not stand the working conditions and either jumped off the boat as the means to kill oneself or jumped off the boat to get away from those conditions. There were about 1000 of those who got away and got stranded in the small villages on the Benjina island, the Ambon island, and the Tual island. Some died from the harsh living conditions and some were hunted by the influential people to get back to work in the boats again.
9. The LPN foundation learned from the workers that they would not get paid until their boats docked in Thailand, most of these journeys took about 6 years at least, and half of these workers were then traded by the employers to work on the different boats, the total sum of the years working in these boats for some workers could last 10 to 25 years.
10. We have seen and witnessed the real hell for these workers when we visited Ambon, Tual and Benjina island. The truth must be told and the public needs to step in to help these abusive workers urgently!

Table1: the numbers of the workers rescued and repatriated back by the LPN coordination from August 2014 to August 2015

No.	Nationality	Island/Indonesia	Number (person)
1	Lao	Ambon	4
2	Cambodia	Ambon	4
3	Myanmar	Ambon	34
4	Thailand	Ambon /Benjina/Tual	189
	Total		231

There have been more than 200 fishing workers crying for our help to return home till these days. The breakdown of the victims crying out for help are 100 in Benjina island, 1000 in Ambon island, 50 in Tual island, 30 in Potianak, Kalimantan, and 30 in Saumlaki island.

Currently, there are 111 unnamed graves on the Benjina island. Only three bodies have been identified and only one corpse made it back home. The DNA verification, liaising with the Consulate, liaising with the families in order to help the fishing workers are our work in progress.

Table 2: Summary of action in assisting fishermen from Indonesia between August 2014 - August 2015.

Time	Dates	Description	Result
1	24-19 August 2014	First survey, found 6 Thai fishermen asking for help, built temporary shelter and provided food and accommodation for the victims, coordinated with the government counterparts (DSI, Mins of HDSS, Consulate) and the INGO counterparts (IOM, UNACT)	The first group of Thai victims rescued back to Thailand on the 1st October 2014
2	11- 23 September 2014	The first group of Thai victims rescued back to Thailand on the 1st October 2014	15 fishermen being rescued
3	15 Nov-3 Dec 2014	LPN did another survey from Ambon to Benjina, found vast graves of Thai fishermen and some victims being stranded in the island more than 18 years.	10 fishermen being rescued
4	11 -20 Jan 2015	LPN coordinated with Ambon Immigration To help child victims and helped repatriating the mentally-illed victims	6 children being rescued 12 Thai fishermen being rescued
5	12 Mar – 6 Apr 2015	Found a lot of stranded fishermen in Ambon island, 60 fishermen still being held in Ambon but could only be rescued 10 at a time. Media coverage on the mass graves, vicctims, and detained victims, resulting in the return of fishermen on C 130 flight Surveillance in Ambon and Benjina Islands Indonesian government ordered the Navy boats to rescue and repatriate 500 fishermen (Laotian, Burmese and Cambodian) from Benjina island	21 fishermen being rescued from Ambon island 68 Thai fishermen being rescued and repatriated by C130 flight 5 detained fishermen returned home
6	12 Mar – 6 Apr 2015	LPN went back to Indonesia to provide assistance to the fishermen in Indonesia. More 700 Thai fishermen returned home from Benjina island	Fishermen gradually arrived Thialnd but did not receive proper labor rights protection from the government
7	20 -31 August 2015	Body exhumation and DNA testing 500 Burmese fishermen still waiting to repatriate in Ambon Island , three have lost eyesight and hands from work but have not been compensated. All workers have not gotten paid their wages, ranging from 1-7 years. 500 fishermen left stranded on the Ambon, Benjina and Tual Island. Some fell sick and had expressed the needs to return home to restore their health but have not gotten assistance from the employers.	

Table 3 : The Number of the rescued victims being sent back, Aug 14 – Aug 15

Nationalities of fishermen	Number of people	Coordinating Agencies	Coordinating Agencies
Thai	1,613	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Thailand)+Business Owners LPN Foundation as coordinator Paveena Foundation	Benjina Island Ambon Island Tual Island Potianak/ Kalimantan
Burmese	628*	Indonesian government + IOM Benjina 326 persons Ambon 300* persons	300 fishermen waiting for nationality verification at the Ambon island. LPN coordinates with the stakeholders on their unpaid wages
Cambodian	65	Indonesian government + IOM Benjina 58 persons Ambon 7 persons	LPN coordinates with the stakeholders on their unpaid wages
Laotian	14	Indonesian government + IOM Benjina 8 persons Ambon 6 persons	LPN coordinates with the stakeholders on their unpaid wages LPN contacts the victims' families
Total	2,250		

* Number of Estimates