

Towards Fishing Safely

A regional tripartite seminar for the Americas on the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007, was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during 24–26 August 2009

From 24 to 26 August 2009, representative delegations of governments, employers and workers in the fishing sector met at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to discuss the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007, of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The following countries were represented: Argentina (government, employers and workers); Brazil (government, employers and workers); Chile (employers and workers); Colombia (government and workers); Ecuador (government, employers and workers); Honduras (government, employers and workers); Mexico (employers and workers); Panama (government, employers and workers); Peru (government, employers and workers); Dominican Republic (government); and Uruguay (government and workers).

Brazil's delegation was headed by the Ministry of Labour, accompanied by the Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture. The meeting was opened by Lais Abramo of Brazil's ILO office, who asked for the observance of a minute's silence in memory of the seven fishermen who recently died at sea after their boat overturned in the south of Brazil, a tragic incident that was also a reminder that fishing is among the most hazardous professions in the world.

This was the second regional seminar promoting the ILO Fishing Convention, and the first in the Americas. The Rio meeting gave participants an opportunity to clear doubts about aspects of the Convention, and for ILO staff to increase their knowledge about the social and labour situation in the member countries, to get updates

on the status of the Convention's ratification process, and to recognize the potential roadblocks in its implementation.

The presentations by government, employer and worker representatives provided important information about obstacles to the ratification of the Convention in each country, allowing for the identification of concrete actions to improve working conditions for fishworkers, and how to facilitate the ratification process.

In many countries, it was realized, there is a need to improve co-ordination among different agencies involved in the application of the Convention, such as those related to labour, fisheries

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and maritime affairs. The need to strengthen tripartite processes of consultation and technical assistance in all the countries to further the ratification process was also stressed. The seminar was also informed of the need to determine flexibility in the 'progressive implementation' of the Convention in each country.

Most important

The Work in Fishing Convention, 2007, is the most important international instrument that seeks to foster the concept of decent work in fisheries by promoting the harmonization of working and living conditions,

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including accommodation and contract issues on fishing vessels, besides including mechanisms that permit a gradual implementation of certain provisions of the Convention, depending on the ground reality in each country and the type of fishing fleet involved.

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Before starting procedures for submission and ratification, the labour authorities in each country should ask all public agencies and social actors to identify aspects relative to the progressive implementation of the Convention, so that each country can select exclusions and progressive application of provisions, through national legislation. Such a consultation process, as well as advances in harmonization of national laws and the resolution of doubts regarding the Convention, should be done prior to the ratification of the Convention.

Countries should ask ILO to continue with technical assistance and information campaigns, workshops and seminars, and modules for training and communication. All these should aim to reveal the potential of the Convention

so that stakeholders have all the information necessary to take informed and conscientious decisions. Channels of dialogue should be established to advance the process of discussion of the Convention at a national level, as is already happening in Argentina, Brazil and Chile.

The implementation of the Convention will contribute to reducing unfair competition, and bring about a safer industry that can incorporate advances in technology and fishing vessel design so as to mitigate accidents and health hazards in fishing operations.

A country-by-country forecast for ratification of the Convention was attempted at the Rio seminar. **Argentina** expects the Convention to be ratified. **Brazil** is on the way to ratification, as promised by the Fisheries Minister in 2007. However, there are over 90,000 vessels in the country that do not offer sufficient safety measures for fishers. The Labour Ministry expects the Fisheries Ministry to go ahead with fleet modernization. Brazil's legislation already reflects the provisions of the Convention; it now needs to be put into practice, and there is also a great need for training. **Chile** expects the Convention to be ratified. **Colombia** will start dissemination of the Convention's provisions, and begin dialogue prior to working on legislative proposals. **Ecuador** will have tripartite discussions after the national elections. **Panama** will hold dialogue with the sectors before presenting the Convention to parliament. National legislation will also consider the interest of artisanal fishers. **Peru** has been working on discussions and dialogue, and needs time to work with employers and employees to clarify issues. Peru's employers have provided funds for fishworkers' social security, and training for fishers' safety. **Uruguay** has been holding tripartite consultations since December 2008.

Important participation

At the conclusion of the Rio seminar, the importance of the participation of groups like the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF) and the

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Trawlers at San Antonio harbour, Chile. The country expects to soon ratify the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007

International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA) was specifically mentioned. It was also pointed out that Spain, whose ambassador was present, was one of the countries that had financially supported the seminar.

On the last day of the seminar, participants visited the naval simulator of the Rio de Janeiro Port Authority, where an impressive assembly of technology for training ships' captains was displayed. The concluding dinner at a typical *churrascaria* (a Brazilian steakhouse) brought the seminar to a happy end.

Personally, at the beginning of the seminar, I did feel somewhat like a fish out of water, due to my limited knowledge of the subject and also because the main focus was on industrial fisheries. Even though artisanal fisheries were mentioned by several speakers, it was obvious that the Convention was mainly geared towards fishers on board industrial vessels. But conversations with the leader of the Brazilian delegation, Vera Albuquerque of the Labour Ministry, showed that at least within the Brazilian government, there is genuine concern for artisanal fishers and, as far as social-security benefits are concerned, Brazilian fishers are well protected. It is up to representatives of artisanal fishers to lobby their fisheries authorities to address their constituents' concerns. Unfortunately, at the seminar there was hardly any representative from the artisanal fishery of any country of the region. (One representative of the National Federation of Fishermen of Brazil was present, but stayed only for an afternoon.)

My personal impression, which was shared by several representatives I talked to, is that the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007, has a very good chance of being ratified, but it may take some time to happen. 



Unloading cargo from a fishing boat, Argentina. Fishing is among the most hazardous professions in the world

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**ILO and FAO Working Together:
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www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/sector/sectors/mariti.htm

Maritime Activities at the ILO

www.safety-for-fishermen.org/en/
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