



DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING  
INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## Message on the occasion of World Fisheries Day November 21, 2019

### **Social Responsibility in the Fisheries Value Chain: towards an integral approach**

Each year, World Fisheries Day is celebrated on November 21 to highlight the importance of an essential sector for the survival and food necessity of millions of people around the world, and the need to act with a sense of responsibility to ensure social, environmental and economic sustainability, as well as legality of this now globalized industry. The Dicastery for Promoting Human Integral Development urges us to address the theme chosen for this year, that is “Social Responsibility in the Fisheries Value Chain”, from the integral approach proposed by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si*, which underlines the need for an integral ecology.

Ten years ago, in the encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI observed that “even if the ethical considerations that currently inform debate on the social responsibility of the corporate world are not all acceptable from the perspective of the Church's social doctrine, there is nevertheless a growing conviction that *business management cannot concern itself only with the interests of the proprietors, but must also assume responsibility for all the other stakeholders who contribute to the life of the business*: the workers, the clients, the suppliers of various elements of production, the community of reference (...) many far-sighted managers today are becoming increasingly aware of the profound links between their enterprise and the territory or territories in which it operates”<sup>1</sup>. “Research centres and seminars in business ethics are on the rise; the system of ethical certification is spreading (...), as part of the movement of ideas associated with the responsibilities of business towards society”.

However, we must note that this effective assumption of responsibility is seriously lacking in the fishing chain. By its very nature, human activity at sea is particularly difficult to monitor and control: the vastness of the oceans has facilitated “negligence (...) and freedom from oversight by the authorities”<sup>2</sup>. The area defined as “common heritage of mankind” by the Convention on the Law of the Sea (Article 136) is, in reality, one in which human life is constantly at risk.

Fishing, in fact, is considered one of the most perilous jobs in the world, and every year over 32,000 fishermen lose their life<sup>3</sup>, with tragic repercussions for their families and communities. To receive information on one's own rights and, above all, to receive adequate assistance in times of need is practically non-existent for those who are in the high sea for long months, if not for years. Moreover, cases of abuses, precarious working conditions, false contracts and even slavery take place repeatedly. Trafficking of persons “has expanded through collaboration among numerous and

<sup>1</sup> *Caritas in veritate*, § 40 and 45.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Pope Francis signed by the Cardinal Secretary of State, to the participants in the Conference “Our Ocean” held in Malta, October 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Estimation FAO “Safety for Fishermen”, <http://www.fao.org/fishery/safety-for-fishermen/en/>



various perpetrators, making the phenomenon more complex<sup>4</sup>". A profitable phenomenon that grows from scams, desperation, the misfortune of migrants snatched from their families and victims of unseen violence. Once again, we invite Governments, International Organizations and all authorities in charge to assume their responsibility in guaranteeing the application of conventions and laws that assure the social protection of fishermen and their rights.

The oceans, furthermore, are endangered by negligence, predation and pollution. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing constantly damages "our common home"<sup>5</sup> and consumes resources without considering "each ecosystem's regenerative ability in its different areas and aspects"<sup>6</sup>.

There is already a convergence of ideas on these issues in the UN 2030 Agenda, particularly in 14<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal<sup>7</sup>. It is time to reawaken our sense of responsibility, to join forces and to take action in order to eradicate these destructive phenomena.

In the global economy, and therefore also in the fishing industry, social responsibility risks being conceived and applied vaguely, becoming – in this way – mere formalism; a procedure to be carried out in order to give a good impression or to avoid sanctions. However, as Benedict XVI reminds us: "Without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation"<sup>8</sup>. Using concepts such as "truth" and "love for what is true", we must be aware that we are using terminology that – while rich in meaning for the Catholic Church, as well as for other religions – is not the common to the United Nations.

We are confident, however, that individuals and organizations alike will recognize the motivation<sup>9</sup> that can come from authentic values and religious references as a contribution to the improvement of every situation and to persevere in a positive change<sup>10</sup> since, for as Pope Francis explains: "To receive God's love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our life and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others"<sup>11</sup>. Everyone can make the reflections on human rights and on the sense and indicators of development as a point of reference. Even the United Nations is aware that happiness is a fundamental human goal not reflected by the usual economic indicators, in particular by the search for simple growth of the Gross Domestic Product<sup>12</sup>.

In conclusion, various possibilities of implementing social responsibility in an integral way emerge in the light of the principle of subsidiarity<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Pastoral Orientation on Human Trafficking*, 2019, § 29.

<sup>5</sup> Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, § 1 and 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Laudato si'*, § 140.

<sup>7</sup> For ex. the *Work in Fishing Convention* (2007), *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication* (2014), *Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing* (2017), and more recently the *Torremolinos Declaration*.

<sup>8</sup> *Caritas in veritate*, § 5.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Laudato si'*, § 17 and 64.

<sup>10</sup> Last July, at the United Nations Headquarters in Nairobi, a Conference was held which highlighted the possible and desirable synergies between religions and the pursuit of sustainable development goals.

<sup>11</sup> Pastoral Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, § 178.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. General Assembly Resolution A/RES/65/309.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 185-188; *Caritas in veritate*, § 47 e 57; *Laudato si'*, § 142 e 157.



To understand social responsibility in an integral way, that is, to conceive such a responsibility that: prioritizes safety at work, with the adequate training and equipment for the profession performed; gives access to medical care, legal and pastoral assistance; underlines the lawfulness of the contract, as well as foresees a decent and consistent salary in the case of employment; fosters the bonds with one's own community; is geared towards, in the end, the happiness of both fisherman and his family.

To listen to the voices of fishermen and their families, supporting their will and ability of organization and self-determination.

To insist on the social responsibility of corporations (from multinational conglomerates to small family businesses), of credit institutions and of investors, whether they work at sea or on land in the supply and processing within the fishing industry; and to ensure the obligation to remedy every case of the violation of human rights in the fishing industry.

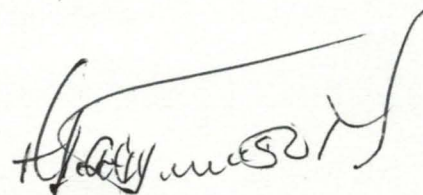
To create a synergy among the various governmental and maritime authorities so that they may oversee responsibly the protection of human rights and guarantee access to information and justice through mechanisms and procedures appropriate to the challenges faced.

To raise awareness among consumers, who influence decisions and market through their choices of companies, so as to favor a more humane and dignified work environment, without neglecting the frequent and problematic pressure exerted by advertising.

To consider respect for human rights (including, of course, the rights concerning the labor of men and women) and for the environment a priority in education, especially in the formation of administration and officials, law enforcement, fishermen, investors, entrepreneurs, and the mass media used by these various communities.

It is therefore urgent and indispensable that Governments address concretely – also through collaboration with international and regional organizations and civil society – the issue of social responsibility in the fishing sector, and more generally in all sectors regarding the relationship between oceans and humanity. It is necessary to maintain a particular vigilance for the most critical situations of vulnerability, crime and poverty, and to facilitate and encourage the most praiseworthy situations that, for example, involve and integrate marginalized communities, people with disabilities, or that use fishing techniques that are particularly respectful of the environment and of human health.

Vatican City, November 21, 2019



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