LABOUR CONDITIONS IN THAI FISHERIES AND FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS.

28th February 2014, Brussels

On 28th February 2014, BSCI (The Business Social Compliance Initiative) and ILO (The International Labour Organisation) joined forces to seek for solutions and synergies to improve working conditions in the Food Processing industry in Thailand. The Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) is a business-driven initiative for companies committed to improving working conditions in the global supply chain. It unites hundreds of companies around one common Code of Conduct and supports them in their efforts to build an ethical supply chain.

Thai fisheries industry is of vital importance to Thailand’s economy. Thailand is one of the world’s top ten fishing nations in terms of total catch. According to FAO, Thailand ranked third (behind China and Norway) in 2010 in the top-ten exporters of fish and fisheries products, with a value of US$7 billion (up from US$4 billion in 2000).

Fisheries sector is labour intensive and provides job opportunities for large numbers of Thai citizens but also attracts a large number of migrant workers from neighbouring countries especially from Myanmar, Lao PDR, and Cambodia. Overall it is estimated that the fisheries sector generates employment for more than 2 million workers in fishing, processing, and related economic sectors.

Recently, global attention has focused on labour conditions in the fisheries industry, which includes fishing, aquamarine farming, primary processing, and packing/processing for local and export markets related industries. The fisheries industry is characterized by high use of migrant workers, many of whom lack legal status and have entered Thailand through informal brokerage arrangements including being smuggled. Reports on incidents of child labour, forced labour, discrimination, trafficking in persons and generally gaps in working conditions regularly surface in the media, indicating a need to address labour protection in the industry. In this regard, international brands and retailers were invited to join forces in an open debate to identify the major bottlenecks and find solutions together.

By the other hand, the event organisers had the opportunity to show the code of conduct version 1/2014 which includes the values and principles that BSCI participants strive to implement in their supply chains. BSCI participants expect their business partners to ensure the continuous improvement of working conditions within their organisations.

Furthermore, any business partners that are monitored against the principles below are to show evidence that they take all necessary measures to ensure their own observance of the BSCI Code of Conduct and reasonable measures to ensure that all of their business partners involved in the production process observe the BSCI Code of Conduct.

- The rights of Freedom of association and collective bargaining
- No discrimination
- Fair remuneration
- Decent working hours
- Occupational health and safety
- No child labour
- Special protection for young workers
- No precarious employment
- No bonded Labour
- Protection of the Environment
- Ethical Business Behaviour.

Action Plan for Thailand

The Royal Thai Government has sought the cooperation of various public organizations, private agencies and NGOs in its efforts to prevent, mitigate, and address labour issues in fishing, shrimp and seafood industry in Thailand. The Government has established the National Committee for Anti-trafficking in Persons which is being chaired by the Prime Minister. In fact, as a result of its recent Committee meeting, the Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan 2012-2013 of Thailand was issued, delegating various government agencies to conduct relevant activities. This Action Plan is a result of a series of interagency consultation and reflects the Thai Government’s strong determination and commitment to address the issue of human trafficking. The Action Plan covers five major aspects: 1) effective preliminary identification of victims; 2) increased efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking offenders and officials engaged in trafficking-related corruption; 3) improved labour inspection standards and procedures; 4) improved efforts to enforce compliance with the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act B.E.2551 (2008); and 5) enhanced efficiency and protection of workers in the fishing industry.

CONCLUSION

BSCI and ILO are looking for a greater involvement of the EU seafood industry in improving working conditions in Thai fisheries and Food processing Industry.

To make this real, there are different initiatives such as the BSCI Code of Conduct or the Good Labour Practices programme which is a comprehensive fisheries industry improvement programme that combines establishment of industry labour guidelines with a supportive good labour practices training programme. Special attention is given to unacceptable forms of work such as child labour and forced labour.

Ethical Trading Initiative, (ETI) is a ground-breaking alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. A representative of this initiative also presented its own project which consist in engaging with key stakeholders both local and international - and including workers - to identify and implement collaborative action plans which address poor working conditions and improve the lives of vulnerable workers.

Links:

Thai Fisheries and Food Processing Industry Overview: Government initiatives on Labour Improvement. Dr. Warapong Prompoj, Senior Expert on International Fisheries Affairs, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives:

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fao_ilo/pdf/Presentations/Labour_issue_Thailand_COFI_s_e.pdf
Good Labour Practices (GLP) Guidelines for primary processing workplaces in the shrimp and seafood industry of Thailand:


Good Labour Practices (GLP) Training and Capacity Building Programme Overview for Shrimp and Seafood Processing Sector in Thailand

