

PRESS RELEASE



Progressive Minister Smashes Shackles With Revolutionary New Approach

An International Conference on Human Rights Protection in the Fishing Industry will be held on Monday 27 March 2017. Hosted by the Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries and the Foundation for International Human Rights Reporting Standards (FIHRSST) in cooperation with ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) Indonesia, and with the support of the Foreign Ministry of Belgium, the half-day event is being held at the ministry to introduce to the world a brand new approach to tackle a very old problem.

It's almost two years since Indonesia, and ASEAN as a whole, was embarrassed as the Benjina incident burst onto the world's headlines; something of which we'd always been vaguely aware perhaps was now front and center in all its brutal ugliness. Thus it is only fitting that thanks to the determination of Marine Affairs and Fisheries Minister, Susi Pudjiastuti, Indonesia has developed a revolutionary approach to combat slavery and other crimes associated with illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUUF) – a mandatory Fisheries Human Rights System and Certification for all those involved in the Indonesian fisheries industry.

The minister would be the first to admit, however, that this was a combined effort involving a number of other parties, of which the Indonesian wing of Belgian-registered Association For Human Rights Reporting Standards (AISBL) has played a prominent role. There has been a further Belgian link too, for the Foreign Ministry of Belgium has been most supportive of the efforts of all involved, as befitting what is in many ways the entry point into Europe with its capital housing many of the important institutions of the European Union.

The intention of this international conference is first and foremost to introduce and explain this, the world's first mandatory human rights certification process for a fisheries industry. That is but part, however, for we also intend to explore how this may impact on human rights protection in the fisheries industries across ASEAN, as well as how a certification process for fishery products can help boost their acceptance on foreign markets. For as Belgian Ambassador, Patrick Herman, has pointed out, "Belgium is a major EU gateway and market for imported fishery products and guaranteed quality in respect to international standards is a must."

The establishment of a sustainable, ethical Indonesian fisheries industry is on the mind of Minister Susi too, but she also cares for the welfare of Indonesian fisherman elsewhere, having said: "We've made it safe for your nationals operating in Indonesia waters; who is going to protect the rights of Indonesians working on fishing boats in your waters?" With perhaps 600,000 Indonesians at risk according to some figures, that's a leading question.