

**A Presentation to the AOS XXIV World Congress**

**Ambassador Hotel, Kaohsiung, Taiwan**

**October 1-7, 2017**

**“Go into the Deep” (Luke 5:4) of SOCSARGEN Fishers**

**Region XII in the Philippines**

Greetings:

To His Excellences and Eminence, Priests, religious men and women and our lay partners in the ministry from the different countries, Good Morning!

This presentation will bring to you the going into the deep of the life and death situation of the South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sarangani and General Santos City (SOCSARGEN) fishers or the Region XII in the southern part of the Philippines, especially in General Santos City as it is known as the Tuna Center in the Philippines.

The AOS through the Stella Maris Seafarers Drop-in Center of the Diocese of Marbel is the pastoral ministry of the local congregation of the Oblates of Notre Dame (OND) that has operated since 2006 and started engaging with the fishers since 2011. It begun with the repatriation of six fishers detained in Papua New Guinea and the repatriation of human remains of a fisher from Taiwan as referred by Fr. Bruno before.

**I. Going into the Deep (Luke 5: 4) = (Duc en Altum) of the fishers’ situation =**

**World Scenario Philippines Fisheries Profile:** In 2013, Philippines was ranked seventh among the top fish producing countries in the world; the world's third largest producer of aquatic plants having produced a total of 1.56 metric tons or 5.78% of the world production of 26.98 metric tons.

The fishing industry's contribution to Gross Domestic Product in 2016 was 14,480,720 pesos and in the Gross National Income 17,430,420 pesos. In the first quarter of 2017, the fishing industry has contributed to the National Economy in Gross Domestic Product 3,575,838 pesos and 4,350,991 pesos to the Gross National Income.<sup>1</sup> The amount and volume by which the sector is creating speaks otherwise of the situation of the fisherfolks in the local front.

**Employment in Fishing Industry:** The industry employed a total of 1,614,368 fishing operators nationwide. Municipal fisheries sector accounted for 1,371,66 operators; commercial operators: 16,497; aquaculture operators: 226,195. In April 2016, the fishing industry has employed 12.3 thousand while as of April 2017, fishing industry has employed 11.8 thousand.<sup>2</sup> There are five canning industries in General Santos City and four of these are exporters.

### **III. Fishers Situationer:**

#### **1. Fisherfolks in Commercial/Deep Sea Fishing**

The Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources has issued a total of 8,894 licenses to fisherfolks on commercial fishing vessels in the second half of 2016.

**1.1. Illegal Fishing and Illegal Entry:** Detention of fishers on either cases of illegal fishing or illegal entry to Indonesian Waters. Philippine fishers

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<sup>1</sup> Fisheries Situationer, January-December 2016, Fisheries Statistics of the Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority, April 2016 and April 2017 Labor Force Survey

go to the deep seas of Philippine waters but the fishing boat passengers/fishers who are on “pakura” (small boat with one passenger) go beyond the Philippine waters that led them to their arrests and fishing boat impounding, if caught by the Indonesian Naval. The fishing boats and its passengers or fishers on board, due to lack of proper documentation, are arrested and detained.

The arrested fishers are detained in the different detention centers of Indonesia. There are unaccounted Filipino detained fishers in Indonesia; by unaccounted we mean - AOS has no actual count on the number of detained fishers. Neither have we visited them due to lack of funds.

Once detained, the fishers do not receive compensation or support from most of the boat operators neither for their respective families. They are left to fend for themselves in order to survive. The collateral damage of fishers’ detention are the families: the children and the women: (a) Families suffer the most – due to poverty; (b) mothers scamper to look for basic needs of the family. In the data of the National Anti-Poverty Commission, the fishers sector is the poorest of the poor. They are in a life of “born to fish, forced to work” predicament that leaves them living in poverty together with their families.

### **1.2. Unfair Labor Practices:**

The fishers are not employed by the boat operators or fishing companies, hence, non-compliant to labor standard; they are either recruited and taken as “passengers” of the fishing boat but do fishing in the deep seas, hence, unclear status of employment, no insurances, and fringe benefits. Compensation are either through ‘joint venture agreement scheme’, which in most cases does not guarantee legal compliance to the spirit of the law on joint venture. None enforcement of Dept. of Labor and Employment Department Order 156-16.

- Commercial fish workers get their share of the catch/production through the boat operators; but fishers have no access to monitoring in the delivery of their harvest in terms of kilograms, classification, and pricing; it is determined by the financier.

1.3. There exist child labor practices – some fishers claimed that they have been in the work as early as 13 years old.

**2. Trafficking in Persons:** It is a fact that some fishers recruited to fish in the deep seas are caught up being exchanged for a job in Indonesia without their knowledge. In most cases, they land in jail for illegal entry without proper documents to present. The victims are fishers who are “sold” by certain personnel of the fishing company. At present AOS has six complainants to illegal trafficking. Out of the 22 victims, only 5 decided to file a case due to repeated and traumatic experiences being caught up in illegal dealings of the guys in the fishing company. A lot more are there but due to poor justice system in the Philippines and due to lack of opportunity for work to survive their families they kept quiet instead and continue to work in commercial fishing.

b. The Marginal Fishers:

**1. Unreported and Unregulated.** Presence of trawl at the municipal waters; fish drops due to scarcity of fish supply by sea, fish pens, fish nets plus mesh nets; poor enforcement of the Philippines Fisheries Code; Poverty among fishers/marginal fishers; the poorest of the poor. Fish catch are also unregulated. In addition, the methods of fish catch remain as estimated 150,000 kilograms of sodium cyanide is used in coral reef each year to produce PhP16M, average 10,000 blast fishing per day<sup>3</sup>; hence, a challenge to cope with.

#### **IV. RESPONSES OF AOS GENERAL SANTOS CITY**

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Agriculture / Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources

## A. Services to the Fishers and their families

### 1. Legal Services

1.1 Repatriation: AOS facilitates repatriation of human remains of detained fishers and surviving detainees;

#### SUMMARY OF REPATRIATION INCIDENTS:

Individual cases:

1. Human Remains	= 4
2. Individual	= 1
Group Repatriation	= 566
Total Repatriation Cases	= 571

- Illegal entry or illegal fishing accounts 99% cause of detention in Indonesia

1.2. Assistance to cases of crisis intervention;

1.3. Mediation and Negotiation: legal assistance to fishers through mediation/negotiation with the fishing operators for financial support to families of detained fishers. What was accounted for are only those whom we have processed and reported to AOS when they have arrived in the Philippines. Otherwise, we have more than these figures.

1.4 Assistance to victims of Trafficking in Persons among fishers:

- Assisted 22 fishers who were victims of human trafficking. Out of the 22 illegally trafficked fishers, only 5 filed a case against the illegal recruiter/boat owner. The five fishers are put under the Witness Protection Program (WPP) of the government/ through the Department of Justice or DOJ.

## **2. Organizing Families and Dependents of Fishers**

- Organizing the fishers and their families is a response to the poverty issue of the fishers especially those in commercial fishing; Self Help approach to empowering the women/wives of the fishers through education, access to resources, support group and services; 49 Self Help Groups (SHGs) have been organized among the fishers' wives, where they have access to loan for their daily needs.

## **3. Livelihood Assistance to fishers**

- AOS engaging in livelihood support to the poor marginal and commercial fishers; repatriated fishers have availed of the KABUHAYAN livelihood project of the government Department of Labor and Employment and the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) Regional Reintegration Network or ORRN.

- AOS provided emergency assistance to fishers' victims of Typhoon Bopha/Pablo in 2012. Families of the fishers flocked to the AOS Center asking for help. Five hundred fifty-three fishers (553) perished by Typhoon Bopha but remains missing until now in the hearts of their families. Rescue team for the victims of the typhoon was formed. Livelihood support to the wives and Dependents of missing fishers of Typhoon Bopha. Released the Department of Labor and Employment Kabuhayan Starter Kit to 57 wives of missing fishers during typhoon Bopha and financial assistance by the government.

## **4. Advocacy and policy lobbying**

### **4.1 Conducted Small-scale fisher's forum to combat cases at sea**

4.2 Lobbied for the enforcement of Dept. of Labor and Employment Department Administrative Order (DAO) 156-16 – that is regularizing the fishers on commercial fishing in the deep sea (ILO 188).

4.3. Press Interview to expose the social ills affecting the fishers

4.4. Celebrated the 1<sup>st</sup> National Fisherfolks Day in Gen Santos City.

AOS initiated the celebration as a recognition of the work done by the fishers, whose labor is indispensable contribution in bringing food to the table and wealth to the industries, who on the account of their work at sea more often than not “spend their time outside of their families and deprived of the grace and comfort of their religious and sacramental life”. There were more or less 600 fisherfolks attended the celebration. Giving the repatriated fishers opportunity to be heard and be listened to in their groaning when at the detention. Our gratitude to Hong Kong and Singapore AOS for financial support and presence that helped push the 1<sup>st</sup> celebration. Thank you Frs. Romeo and Valan.

## **V. CHALLENGES OF FISHING TO THE APOSTLESHIP OF THE SEA**

1. Fishers are the poorest of the poor: How can AOS respond to the development needs of the poor fishers? Poverty alleviation for the poorest of the poor: the fishers;
2. Loss marine biodiversity and coastal resources due to coastal and habitat degradation, siltation and pollution;
3. Organizing/empowering small-scale fishers or marginal fishers;
4. Advocacy and Policy lobbying for enforcement of DOLE DAO 156-16 (ILO 188);
5. Stop to Trafficking in Persons;
6. Stop the unregulated fishing in the municipal and deep-sea waters; and
7. AOS General Santos operated with no regular funding source.

“Fishers are the rightful stewards of the sea” Presidential  
Proclamation 261 series of 2000

Thank you