**Belgium. ABVV-FGTB Horval (Translated from Dutch and French) From:** Conny.DEMONIE@horvalwvl.be

**Subject:** Seafood and aquaculture workers: request for contribution to UN report

**Introduction**

ABVV-FGTB HORVAL is solely responsible for aquaculture, the fish processing industry and the sale of fish outside ports. Fishing and the operation of fish auctions are the responsibility of another central body within the ABVV-FGTB.

**- In your opinion, what are the long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic**

**on the fishing industry and its workers?**

**How did local, sub-national and national authorities help during the pandemic?**

**How did workers in the sector help each other through these difficult years?**

At national level: during the Covid-19 pandemic, an infected person could stay at home without a prior medical examination and let the disease run its course in quarantine. Before the pandemic, workers had to submit a medical certificate to their employer on the first day of illness. Since the pandemic, workers no longer have to produce a medical certificate if they are ill for one day (from 28 November 2022). Or for the first day of illness in a longer period of illness. This can be done up to three times a year.

**- In your opinion, what are the main threats facing the**

**workers in the fish sector?**

Multinational companies are the main threat to the fish processing industry. Workers and unions no longer have a regional contact person, or plant managers no longer have any decision-making power. Profits take precedence over job security and investment in ergonomics.

**- What does the fish supply chain look like today? Which companies dominate the sector in your country?**

The main players in the fish processing industry in Belgium are MOWI, Gadus and Morubel.

MOWI Belgium has two sites in Belgium and is part of Mowi ASA. Mowi is the world's largest producer of Atlantic salmon, with a fully integrated value chain from salmon egg to ready meals.

Gadus is owned by Steinasalir, a group of well-established Icelandic fishing companies, fish producers, private funds and private investors. Gadus becomes a stronger player by being owned by one of the main suppliers, which holds a significant share of Iceland's cod catch quota. In other words, the company has its own state-of-the-art production lines.

Morubel is owned by Cooke Inc. and processes, packages and distributes shrimp and seafood products. Cooke Inc. includes global aquaculture divisions, including Cooke Aquaculture Inc. and Kelly Cove Salmon Ltd, as well as seafood and wild fisheries divisions owned by Cooke Seafood USA, Inc, Wanchese Fish Company, Inc, Omega Protein Corporation, Cooke Uruguay SA and Seajoy Seafood Corporation, one of the largest premium shrimp farms in Latin America.

**- What are your main concerns about working conditions at the**

**fish supply chain? Which parts of the supply chain do you consider to be the most important?**

We are thinking in particular of a safety net for workers affected by an accident at work and/or illness. In Belgium, workers receive an allowance for the days they are unable to work, but elsewhere this is not the case. The pressure to produce more and even more cheaply automatically weakens the attention paid to working conditions and pay.

**- In your opinion, how do the issues of modern slavery, exploitation,**

**trafficking in human beings and child labour be dealt with**

**within the framework of national and international policies?**

Trade union data exchange could be a first step.

In addition, unions in Western companies must work towards a sustainable food chain. We must protest if we use raw materials produced in countries characterised by exploitation, human trafficking and child labour. Western companies should report on social audits of suppliers of raw materials from high-risk countries.

**- What do you think of aquaculture? Can this sector benefit both the environment and people?**

Aquaculture is a new sector in Belgium. There are a few very small farms. We are waiting for a large salmon farm to be built. The Norwegian company Columbi Salmon wants to farm 12,000 tonnes of salmon a year on an industrial estate in the port of Ostende. This would be the largest land-based salmon farm in Europe, using a RAS (Recirculating Aquaculture System) facility. The Belgian political authorities are enthusiastic about the project, for employment reasons. On the other hand, the construction has for some time been causing concern among neighbours and environmental and animal rights groups. They fear that the salmon will not be able to move around in the cages (36 salmon are reportedly swimming compressed in one cubic metre) and that they will run a high risk of falling ill. They are also concerned about the environmental impact of the farm, and openly question whether such a business has any place in the port in terms of wastewater discharges and the risk of soil pollution. It is still too early to know the impact on workers.

**- What national laws or international standards should be implemented**

**to better serve and protect the interests of workers in the**

**fishing industry?**

In Belgium, national legislation is implemented in sectoral collective labour agreements, specifically for the food industry and/or the food trade.

**- Have you been able to participate adequately in national and international discussions on**

**relevant international agreements? If not, what discussions have you have**

**been excluded from?**

ABVV-FGTB HORVAL takes part in sectoral discussions and negotiations in the food industry and/or food trade.

In fish processing and trading companies, we have delegates who take part in consultation at company level. Both structurally via works councils and committees for prevention and protection at work, and ad hoc via trade union consultation at company level.

**- In your opinion, what are the main obstacles to implementing the agreements in the seafood and fish production sector?**

1. The language

2. the preparatory meeting

**- To what extent are the FAO guidelines on small-scale fishing relevant to your work?**

Small-scale fishing is not our area of activity. But we certainly see the importance of working with the FAO to develop a policy to promote working conditions in the fishing industry.

**- What do you think of the WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies?**

Fishing itself is not our field of activity.

**- How do you think the Treaty on the High Seas could affect the rights of the fishing communities**

**and workers' rights?**

Fishing itself is not our field of activity.

**- Feel free to add any other information or opinion not covered by the**

**above, but which could be relevant to the report on the right to food**

**and workers in the fisheries sector.**

1. 28 April is World Day for Safety and Health at Work. In some countries, 8 April is Labour Day in the fishing industry. This could be a good time to pay global attention to working conditions in the fishing industry.

2. We are familiar with labels in the sector (MSC, ASC, etc.). Perhaps we should work towards a label for seafood produced under proper working conditions.

3. We learned in Reykjavik that a well-prepared company policy is essential for employing migrant workers. In Belgium, because of the shortage on the labour market, migrants are attracted without being properly welcomed and without knowing their cultural context. Trade unionists have too few tools at their disposal to deal properly with migrant workers. Language is often a barrier in itself. Workers cannot communicate with each other because they do not understand each other.

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