

**Remarks as delivered by Mr. Pisan Manawapat, Ambassador of Thailand to the U.S.
on Latest Updates on Seafood Supply Chains Reform in Thailand
at the Seafood Expo North America 2016
7 March 2016, Boston, Massachusetts**

I would like to thank Mr. John Connelly, NFI President, for organizing this seminar to discuss Thailand's latest efforts to combat human trafficking, labor abuse and illegal fishing. My colleagues from the Command Center for Combating Illegal Fishing, Department of Fisheries, Ministry of Labor and Police flew more than 20 hours from Bangkok for this particular meeting. After our presentation, we look forward to your questions, especially from members of the media and NGOs, to hear your concern and above all, the Embassy looks forward to working with you.

First, we recognize that there are serious problems in Thailand's seafood supply chains relating to human trafficking, labor abuse and illegal fishing. Thanks to the continuous efforts of several NGOs and serious journalists, some have been reported. We were shocked. We find it completely unacceptable. The Thai Government from the highest level has shown resolve. We have achieved results. Yet we know much more will have to be done.

Second, the tide has been turned irreversibly against modern slavery and labor abuse in Thailand. Systematic and comprehensive reform has been in place to make changes sustainable. Under this fight, law has been toughened, enforcement beefed up, shrimp sheds shut down, owners brought to court and victims looked after.

Third, private sector also joins in. In January this year, Thai seafood industry signed a pledge to clean their supply chain. The Thai Government will hold them to account. I ask you as their business partners, media, civil society and educated consumers to also hold them to account for their pledge.

Fourth, Thailand aims no less than striving for the highest standards of ethics and sustainability. It isn't about export or market share. It isn't about trafficking in persons ranking. It is about human dignity and Thailand's standing as a guardian and protector of human rights.

Fifth, partnership is the way forward. Fortunately, we have been working closely with our partners, the U.S. Government and other stakeholders, the NGOs both in Thailand and overseas, our neighboring countries, ILO and other international organizations, and the media.

Environment Justice Foundation, or EJF, Europe's leading NGO and authority on IUU, has rightly been very critical and rightly been relentless in pursuing the right kinds of action against IUU from the Thai Government, Yet, I am very grateful that it is extending cooperation and support to the Thai Government. It dispatched an expert to offer behavioral

analysis training to Thai officers to enhance their capability of using Vessel Monitoring System. It shared information with our law enforcement officers leading to an arrest of a local influential person in the south who was a major human trafficker while freeing several of his victims.

To enhance further our partnership in the United States, my Embassy recently invited SkyTruth to meet with a Thai team of experts who flew all the way from Bangkok to meet and exchange their analyses on VMS and SkyTruth system under the Global Fishing Watch project. We are now exploring how skyTruth could add value to VMS.

This week, there will be a Thai NGO delegation called LPN (Labor Rights Promotion Network) visiting Washington. LPN is working closely with the Thai Government to enhance labor rights in seafood industries.

Furthermore, as we speak, CNBC team is arriving in Thailand to begin its investigative report on seafood supply chain in Thailand. Another team of CNBC is covering our meeting right now.

Transparency and openness are what Thailand is offering in working in partnership with you all. I personally am very impressed with SkyTruth technology.

When you look at the Global Fishing Watch map, you will find areas of intensive fishing in every ocean of the world. The map shows clearly what EJF has discovered that West Africa has some of the highest levels of IUU. Given the fact that there are currently only some 70 large fishing vessels with the right documents to go out to fish in the high seas, one cannot help wondering if Thailand is having more than a fair share of scrutiny by the world media on illegal fishing and labor abuses. A recent article by Financial Times (“Journalists need to get out more” by Simon Kuper, 4-5 March 2016) saying that main media have probably always over-covered the metropolis, it is fair to say that journalists would not mind working from sources in Bangkok than town or city in West Africa.

As a career diplomat, I would not be comfortable in defending things I have no confidence about. On this subject of IUU, human trafficking and labor abuse, I am confident that the Thai Government at the top is completely committed to combating them. Compared with this time last year, we have indeed made significant efforts and have come a long way. There will be more progress this time next year. However, many of you may not be satisfied on specific issues some of which may take more than months or years or we may never be able to resolve them in court to everyone’s satisfaction.

I am nevertheless optimistic and confident that this current reform will be systemic, sustainable and long lasting, if we all can work together.
