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1/7/24—Trat, Thailand—For Immediate Release

Release Detained Cambodian Migrant Fishers Now!

Trat, Thailand – The Fishers Rights Network (FRN) continues to demand that the Cambodian and Thai governments take immediate action to secure the release of the ten Cambodian migrant fishers arrested in a December 22 IUU fishing incident. The Thai captain of the vessel N. Charoenphorn (292332657) has been released, but the migrant fishers remain in custody in Trat prison, and the vessel owner has not been charged.

All fishers involved were following the directives of their employer and should not be held responsible or detained for this incident.

At the end of December, fishers on the Thai-flagged N. Charoenphorn, based in Trat province, were arrested for fishing illegally in Cambodian waters. These fishers also remain incarcerated in Trat, and the Cambodian and Thai governments must take action to secure their release.

Poor implementation and enforcement of the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (C188) by the Thai government is to blame for these incidents, as labor abuse and severe exploitation continue to plague the industry and have set the stage for IUU fishing to return.

“Fishers have no power over where they are taken to fish, many are forced to work overtime with limited hours of rest, have their passports held by their employer, and are in debt bondage—all clear indicators of forced labor,” said Malin Tum, from the Fishers Rights Network. “IUU fishing is perpetrated by captains and vessel owners are responsible for any actions taken by their vessels, including illegal fishing and labor abuse.”

FRN calls on the Thai government to address the widespread labor rights abuses in the industry by enforcing Thai law and ILO Convention 188, ensuring the safety and fair treatment of fishers, and improving working conditions so incidents like this do not occur again. “We are ready to work with the Thai authorities to bring about meaningful reforms and ensure that the rights of all fishers are respected, but these fishers need to be released first,” said Tum.

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