



# carmelngo

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"Due to a number of factors related to their profession, seafarers are invisible to us and to our society. ... I wish to invite every Christian to look around and realize how many of the objects we use in our daily lives have come to us through the hard and laborious work of seafarers.

—Vatican's Sea Sunday Message  
July 13, 2014



## Trafficking at Sea: Seafarers as the Latest Group of Modern Day Slaves

"The man who goes to sea," wrote Marco Polo, "is a man in despair." It is still true today. But today's man of the sea is also probably poor, and probably exploited. It is a life that means chronic fatigue and overwork, boredom, pirates, and dangers in various forms. Suicide rates of seamen are triple those of land-based occupations and carrying sea cargo is the second-most deadly job on the planet after fishing.

The International Commission on Shipping estimates that thousands of seafarers, working on 10-15 percent of the world's ships, "work in slave conditions, with minimal safety, long hours for little or no pay, starvation diets, rape and beatings."

When something goes wrong at sea, a seafarer often has nowhere to turn. A Filipino, on a Panamanian-flagged ship, travelling from South Africa to the Netherlands, what law is going to govern you? You are a total moving target.

Once on ship, the men endured 20-hour workdays and brutal beatings, only to return home unpaid and deeply in debt.

Thousands of maritime employment agencies around the world provide a vital service, supplying crew members for ships, from small trawlers to giant container carriers, and handling everything from paychecks to plane tickets. While many companies operate responsibly, over all the industry, which has drawn little attention, is poorly regulated. The few rules on the books do not even apply to fishing boats, where the worst abuse tend to happen, and enforcement is lax.

Illegal agencies operate with even greater impunity, sending men to ships notorious for poor safety and labor records; instructing them to travel on tourist or transit visas, which exempt them from the protections of many labor and anti-trafficking laws; and disavowing them if they are denied pay, injured, killed, abandoned or arrested at sea.

One Singapore-based company that recruited several men from one village, has a well-documented record of trouble, according to an examination of court records, police records, and case files in Singapore and the Philippines. In incidents dating back two decades, the company has been tied to trafficking, severe physical abuse, neglect, deceptive recruitment and failure to pay hundreds of seafarers in India, Indonesia, Mauritius, the Philippines and Tanzania.

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Seamen applicants from the Philippines (Photo from [arkibongbayan.org](http://arkibongbayan.org))

Still, its owners have largely escaped accountability. Last year, for example, prosecutors opened the biggest trafficking case in Cambodian history, involving more than 1,000 fishermen, but had no jurisdiction to charge the company for recruiting them.

No country exports more seafarers than the Philippines, which provides roughly a quarter of them globally. More than 400,000 Filipinos sought work last year as officers, deckhands, fishermen, cargo handlers, and cruise workers. Experience shows that governments are sometimes unable or unwilling to protect the rights of citizens far from home.

The abuse of Filipino seamen has increased in recent years, labor officials in the Philippines say, because the country's maritime trade schools produce, on average, 20,000 graduates a year for fewer than 5,000 openings. As men grow desperate for work, they take greater risks. Roughly a third of them now use agencies that are illegal-- unregistered and willing to break rules.

Such agencies, favored by ship operators and workers looking to cut costs, compound the problem of lawlessness on the high seas. Scofflaw ships cast off stowaways and deplete fishing stocks. Violence is rampant, and few nations patrol the waters, much less enforce violations of maritime laws or international pacts.

In Manila along a densely packed two-block stretch of an avenue near the bay, hundreds of seafarers look for work. Recruiters from manning agencies, some of which are legal, many of which are not, carried signs around their necks listing job openings or pointed to brochures arrayed on tables.

Filipinos see working on the ships as a chance to tour the world while earning enough money to help their families. Typically the pay is sent at \$500 per month with a \$50 allowance. When signing up the "processing fees" amount to \$200. The flight to Singapore to cost another \$318.

However, once in Singapore, things were different than promised. Pay is less than half of what he had been promised. And after multiple deductions, the \$200 monthly wage shrunk even more. Those recruited say that the paperwork is done quickly with many fast-moving calculations and unfamiliar terms being used, such as passport forfeiture, mandatory fees, and sideline earnings..

Seamen are required to sign contracts that typically stipulates a three-year binding contract with no overtime pay, no sick leave, 18-20 hour workdays, six-day workweeks, and \$50

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## Related Websites This Issue:

Center for Seafarers' Rights:  
The Seamen's Church Institute  
[seamenschurch.org/csr](http://seamenschurch.org/csr)

ITF Seafarers: Your Legal Rights  
[www.itfseafarers.org/your\\_legal\\_rights.cfm](http://www.itfseafarers.org/your_legal_rights.cfm)

Human Trafficking Thematic Research Series  
[nexusinstitute.net/past-projects/human-trafficking-thematic-research/](http://nexusinstitute.net/past-projects/human-trafficking-thematic-research/)

Human Rights at Sea  
[www.humanrightsatsea.org/tag/trafficking/](http://www.humanrightsatsea.org/tag/trafficking/)

Migrants at Sea  
[migrantsatsea.org/tag/human-trafficking/](http://migrantsatsea.org/tag/human-trafficking/)

Human Trafficking at Sea: Reporter's Notebook  
[www.nytimes.com/2015/11/10/insider/human-trafficking-at-sea-reporters-notebook.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/10/insider/human-trafficking-at-sea-reporters-notebook.html?_r=0)



Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” The Declaration continues in Article 4: “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.” Today slavery still exists, but it has a different name, it’s called human trafficking.

Victims can be any age, and any gender. However, a disproportionate number of women are involved in human trafficking both as victims and as culprits. Female offenders have a prominent role in human trafficking, particularly where former victims become

perpetrators as a means of escaping their own victimization. People whose nationality is the same as that of their victim carry out most trafficking.

A variety of businesses are involved in human trafficking especially those businesses that affect people working at the margins of the formal economy, those with irregular employment or migration status. The businesses most frequently documented are agriculture, construction, garments and textiles (under sweatshop conditions), catering and restaurants, domestic work, entertainment and the sex industry. Human trafficking also affects other mainstream economic sectors, including food processing, health care and contract cleaning, mainly in private but also in public sector employment.

## NO ONE SHALL BE HELD IN SLAVERY OR SERVITUDE

It is important that every effort is undertaken to establish the gravity of the problem and tackle the issue from its source to its destination.

The numbers that are available show the problem has not abated. One challenge is the gathering of accurate information in order that a true picture can be painted.

Human trafficking is an activity of extensive and highly sophisticated international criminal networks. The hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing Syria are prime targets for these criminal networks. Society needs to ensure that, despite the many conflicting priorities countries face, the issue of stopping human trafficking is given a high priority and focus by the international community.

A major challenge is to ensure that all countries ratify and effectively implement the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. This would better foster international cooperation and coordination, particularly in relation to developing information exchange and operational cooperation between law enforcement agencies.

Society must take a more holistic and partnership approach to tackling human trafficking. In this respect, mobilizing the support of NGOs, IGOs, governments and the community at large is critical.

“Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ.”



*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason selfish

or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother... both in the flesh and in the Lord.” (*Paragraph no. 2414*)

Pope Francis had this to say; “Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ. It is a crime against humanity.” Pope Francis offered his encouragement to those working to end the trafficking of “men, women, and children” who are “enslaved, exploited, abused as instruments of work or pleasure, and often tortured and humiliated.” And called governments to action in “removing the cause of this shameful wound... a wound unworthy in a civil society.”

*by Jane Remson, O. Carm.*



## Some Interesting Facts about the Shipping Industry

Just how critical is the shipping industry to the world’s economy? Some 90% of the world’s trade happens on ships. There are more than 1.5 million seafarers on the oceans often for as long as 9 months at a time. The majority of the low-level workers are from developing countries, especially in the Far East and South East Asia, especially from India and the Philippines.

Here are 10 of the most fascinating facts and statistics on the shipping industry:

+ The biggest container ships can hold 745 million bananas in 15,000 containers. That’s one for every European and North American.

+ Line up the containers belonging to Maersk alone, and they would stretch nearly halfway around the planet. Stack them up, and they’d reach to 7,530 Eiffel Towers. Unload their cargo onto trucks, and the traffic would stretch 60 miles.

+ In 2009, the largest 15 ships emitted as much greenhouse gases as 760 million cars—or about two cars for every American.

+ Right now, there are at least 20 million containers crossing the world.

+ Two-thirds of ship crews have no means of communication off the ship. Only 12% have freely available Internet.

+ Females make up only 2% of seafarers. Filipinos make up more than one third of all crews worldwide, with 250,000 at sea.

+ In 2010, Somali pirates held 544 seafarers hostage. Every year, 2,000 seafarers die at sea, with more than two ships lost each day. In 2012, the attack rates on seafarers exceeded the rate of violent assaults in South Africa, the highest-crime country in the world.

+ Worldwide, between 2% to 10% of containers are physically inspected. U.S. ports typically inspect 5% of the 17 million containers they receive a year.

+ Shipping is cheap. So cheap that, rather than fillet its own fish, it is cheaper for Scotland to send its cod 10,000 miles over to China to be filleted and returned to Scotland.

+ The 360 commercial U.S. ports took in international goods worth \$1.73 trillion in 2011. The U.S. relies on shipping to bring in two-thirds of its oil supply.

*From the book, Ninety Percent of Everything*  
by Rose George

monthly food deductions. Captains are free to reassign crew member to other ships at their sole discretion. Wages are held instead of being distributed on a monthly basis to workers' families. Holding wages until the end of the contract is illegal.

Sometimes one must sign for food supplies in advance with the fee being kept by the agency. A "promissary note" requiring the sailor to pay a "desertion penalty" of \$1,800. To collect their wages, crew members would be required to fly back to Singapore at their own expense.

Most sailors have in fact never travelled abroad before. They have never worked on the high seas. Nor are they familiar with the term "trafficking." They are unfamiliar with the concept of a contract or why having their passports confiscated by a company is problematic nor that is kept them from leaving. Most begin their jobs deeply in debt.

While the men are awaiting work, they are housed in an apartment. One described for an article in the *New York Times* had pots and pans stacked in the corners, walls that are greasy from frying food. The floor was so dirty that moss grew in patches. The windows are sealed so the rooms reek of urine and sweat.

New recruits were told to keep their voices down and to avoid moving around. Some of the men were required to leave before 7am and return after dark. Others were confined to the apartment which the manager kept locked all the time. At night 20 or more men lay on flattened cardboard on the floor. The manager required sex from some of the men. "No was not an option," one of the men said, because the manager controlled who got which jobs.



Members of the Carmelite NGO Coordinating Team (l-r) Conrad Mutizamhempo, O. Carm., Andrea Ventimiglia, TOC, Annah Theresa Nyadombo, HOLMC, Arie Kull, O. Carm., Hariawan Adji, O. Carm.

## Carmelite NGO Sets Future Direction During Annual Meeting in Rome

The members of the coordinating team of the Carmelite NGO met at CISA in Rome, Italy from June 22-23, 2015.

The newest member to the team, Dennis Kalob was introduced. He began in January 2015 as coordinator of the New York office. He has been participating in several

conference calls, live streams, and webinars addressing several important issues, from the papal encyclical *Laudato Si* to the role of religion in foreign policy. He assists Carmelites obtaining necessary passes and assist in registering for conferences. He also inaugurated *On the Horizon...*, an update of upcoming events of interest to our members.

The group also discussed the project developing an environmental curriculum for the secondary schools. The strategic plan on human trafficking issues was also discussed.

Members submitted a written report for their area of responsibility within the Carmelite NGO. The organization has received \$55,000 for its activities as well as a one time \$195,000 funding for the BP oil spill.

The topics of the popular Days of Prayer were set as were the topics for future issues of carmeNGO as well as the person responsible for gathering the content.

The group then broke into two groups for discussing the main themes of the Carmelite NGO's work, the curriculum on environmental issues and human trafficking issues. The groups developed a strategic plan for each theme which was then discussed in the plenary session.

The strategic plan on environment was divided into sections: parishes (awareness) and schools (education). The overall goal is to create a healthy path to human fulfilment by provoking in ourselves and especially in our youth a way of living in greater harmony with one another and the earth. Methods will also include our publications, the website, seminars, and workshops. The strategic action plan on human trafficking has four aims: 1) creating an awareness of the situation; 2) protecting human dignity, especially of women and children; 3) supporting the victims, and; 4) protecting the victims.

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