

Taiwan: Civil Society Groups Call for Wi-fi for Migrant Fishermen

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CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS held a press conference in front of [the Taipei Fish Market on February 20th to call for wi-fi access for migrant fishermen](#). Participant groups included the Taiwan Association for Human Rights, Stella Maris Kaohsiung, Global Labor Justice - International Labor Rights Forum, the Humanity Research Consultancy, and Fospi Donggang Pingtung. Legislator Chiu Hsien-chih of the NPP was also present and DPP legislator Hung Sun-han was scheduled to attend but was later unable to make it. According to these groups, this press conference was more than half a year in planning.

In particular, migrant fishermen often spend months, if not years at sea without returning to shore. To this extent, migrant fishermen carry out work under conditions that have been labeled modern slavery, seeing as despite working twenty or more hours a day, they sometimes do not receive pay and face the threat of physical violence on the high seas.

As speakers brought up, the lack of wi-fi access for many migrant fishermen cuts them off from friends and family for months at a time. This isolation contributes to the stresses of work under conditions that are already harsh and hazardous. Yet this also makes it difficult for migrant fishermen to verify if their family has been paid, seeing as if they are not, [they are working under conditions sometimes characterized as modern slavery](#).

Furthermore, migrant workers are allowed the right to organize labor unions in Taiwan, a rarity among the world's nations. But as the conditions facing migrant fishermen cast a long shadow on Taiwan's human rights record, speakers brought up that the right of migrant fishermen to organize labor unions is only for show without wi-fi. Given that migrant fishermen are at sea for months at a time, they are unable to contact their labor unions in the event of labor abuses without wi-fi access.

[The death of the Indonesian fisherman Supriyanto in 2015 was cited as an example](#). Though government officials with the Fisheries Agency and the fishing vessel claimed that Supriyanto died of an infection, many suspected foul play. Supriyanto's corpse washed up in southern Taiwan after being dumped at sea.

VIDEO: STREAM OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE

Speakers cited that this treatment of migrant workers reflects badly on Taiwan's claim to be a country that upholds human rights, [citing how Taiwanese fish has been listed on the US Department of Labor's list of goods produced by forced labor two years in a row](#). Speakers also cited that, as a high-tech nation, Taiwan has little excuse not to install wi-fi on fishing vessels.

It costs 8,000 to 15,000 USD to install wi-fi on fishing vessels, which cost 500,000 USD for smaller vessels and above 1,000,000 USD for larger vessels. As such, it has been pointed out that the cost of installing wi-fi is only a small fraction of the cost to build a fishing vessel. Moreover, over three years, the Fisheries Agency has provided 300,000 NTD to specific fishing vessels for wi-fi

installation, which is also subsidized at 8,000 NT per month, but many vessels have not taken this up.

According to the civil society groups present at the press conference, around 100 of Taiwan's 1,100 fishing vessels have installed wi-fi, which is less than 10% of the fleet. Yet only 27 of those vessels surveyed were providing wi-fi, suggesting that some vessels that have wi-fi capacity may be denying workers access to it.

To push for action, the civil society groups that held the press conference stated that they had collected 537 signatures from migrant workers and 634 signatures from the broader public to call for action to be taken on the matter. This includes from over fifty civil society groups, focused on issues ranging from LGBTQ issues to Hong Kong advocacy groups—demonstrating how this is an issue that is backed by a broad swath of Taiwanese civil society.

It is unclear whether there will be action from policymakers on the issue. Policymakers are disincentivized to take action because migrant workers cannot vote and so will not affect their election performance, while the owners of fishing vessels that hire migrant workers can vote. But they may be incentivized to take action due to the potential impact on international perceptions of Taiwan's human rights record. This is to be seen.

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P.S.

- New Bloom Magazine. 03/02/202:
<https://newbloommag.net/2023/03/02/migrant-fishermen-wifi/>

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