

# PROTECTING FISHERS DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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## How has the pandemic impacted Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing?

The global COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted fisheries and aquaculture food systems. Necessary and life-saving protective measures taken by governments have disrupted national and international seafood supply chains. Despite this, seafood remains a vital source of nutrition, supports the livelihoods of many artisanal fishing communities, and serves as the cornerstone of fish-dependent economies.

Fisheries management processes have largely shifted with the restriction and suspension of obligatory on-board observer programs, and the delay of monitoring and enforcement of measures to increase sustainability and protections for the Ocean, fishers, and fisheries. This, in turn, may foster a lower level of responsible management and control of fishing operations which increases the risk for rising levels of IUU fishing.

## How does the IMO's Cape Town Agreement (CTA) address IUU fishing?

Fishing vessel crew safety and working conditions have further deteriorated as a result of the global pandemic. Longer work periods, close contact, reduced landings, and the closure or reduction of processing activities have been added as stressors and risks to an already unsafe industry.

Until the CTA enters into force, there are no mandatory global safety regulations for fishing vessels. The CTA outlines safety standards for commercial fishing vessels and details regulations that countries party to the agreement must adopt to protect fishing crews and their observers. Through the CTA, countries that have existing fishing vessel safety regulations can support a precedent of higher standards and protections for vulnerable workers; and countries without such regulations have a guideline to protect the valuable, human aspect of their fishing industries.

## How has Belize progressed on CTA ratification?

During the IMO Ministerial Conference in October 2019, Belize signed the Torremolinos Declaration and committed to take action towards CTA ratification by October 2022. Following the election of PGA Member and Prime Minister John Briceño, PGA transmitted a letter of congratulations co-signed by the PGA Secretary-General and Hon. Osmany Salas, further requesting a timeline for CTA ratification. The PGA Secretary-General and Hon. Salas sent similar letters to the Minister Andre Perez (Ministry of the Blue Economy and Civil Aviation) and Minister Orlando Habet (Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Reduction).

## What can legislators do?

Parliamentarians can pose parliamentary questions, meet with the relevant Minister for a formal conversation, or suggest a session to colleagues from relevant parliamentary committees to address the struggles of work in the seafood industry during the pandemic. Parliamentarians for Global Action will be glad to provide additional resources and technical assistance! Contact Senior Advisor, Ms. Leyla Nikjou at [leyla.nikjou@pgaction.org](mailto:leyla.nikjou@pgaction.org); or Program Officer, Ms. Saarah Monawvil at [saarah.monawvil@pgaction.org](mailto:saarah.monawvil@pgaction.org).

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Sources:

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<http://pew.org/2i4YzRP>



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