



PIRATE VESSELS FISH OUT AFRICAN RESOURCES FOR THE EUROPEAN MARKET

3 October 2001

Spain, Vigo - The MV Greenpeace, one of Greenpeace's vessels, arrived in Vigo after a four week expedition to document the ongoing plunder of the marine environment by pirate fishing vessels off the coast of West Africa.

The international environmental group exposed the presence of countless pirate trawlers particularly off the coast of Sierra Leone and Guinea operating outside any control and some of them hiding their identity and flag. These vessels trawl the bottom of the sea, destroying the marine environment and catching species indiscriminately.

Large quantities of unwanted species (crabs, starfish, various shellfish and young fish from the commercial species) are simply thrown overboard, most of them dead. Most of the catch – primarily prawns - goes to the markets of developed countries, in this case Europe. While European consumers might still be unaware of the destruction left behind to provide them with their favourite seafood, the coastal states often lack the capacity, and unfortunately in some cases, the will to control fishing activities in their waters.

Pirate fishing is an expanding global phenomenon. The international community has finally decided to act and, in March this year, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) adopted a global plan of action to fight "illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing" [\(1\)](#). Greenpeace is also encouraged by the proposal by the European Commission to prevent the use of EU public money for the transfer of fishing vessels to Flag of Convenience (FOC) [\(2\)](#) countries.

"The European Commission proposal is a promising step in the right direction", declared H el ene Bours of Greenpeace International. "The least the EU can do is to stop encouraging its member states to reflag to FOCs. Now the EU must also consider measures to actively prevent EU companies from owning or operating such pirate vessels."

The European Parliament will adopt a report on Flags of Convenience in fisheries this autumn. Spain, which will hold the presidency of the European Union during the first half of 2002, has also begun to tackle the problem, adopting new national legislation which allows the Spanish authorities to withdraw the licence of Spanish skippers involved in illegal, unregulated or unreported fishing, including FOC fishing.

However, Greenpeace is concerned that while effective measures may be taken in some parts of the

world, the problem is increasing to dramatic proportions in developing countries such as in the West African region, where the local fishing communities see their fish stocks depleted and their income plummet.

“Developing countries also have their responsibilities. Often, they simply lack the financial or technical means to patrol their waters. However, there are some things that developing countries can do on their own to stop pirate fishing, such as a more judicious selection of vessels which are allowed to fly their flag,” said H el ene Bours, Greenpeace campaigner. “If all countries concerned by this problem were to implement the existing instruments, the use of flags of convenience would be made far more difficult and much less profitable.”

In highlighting the ongoing pirate fishing practices off the coasts of West Africa and their detrimental impacts, Greenpeace hopes to encourage the speedy implementation of the UN FAO international plan of action against IUU fishing. The environmental group is also calling on the United Nations (3), relevant regional and sub-regional organisations, coastal states and states fishing in the region as well the market states to develop concrete and effective long-term solutions to the problem.

Greenpeace demands that governments:

- close ports to FOC fishing and support vessels;
- close markets to FOC-caught fish;
- close or otherwise prevent companies and nationals from owning or operating FOC fishing and support vessels.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

On board the MV Greenpeace:

H el ene Bours, Greenpeace International, mobile phone +32 477 430 171

Maria Jose Caballero, Greenpeace Spain, mobile phone + 34 626 99 82 49.

In Amsterdam:

Natalia Truchi, Greenpeace Press Desk, mobile +31 6 21 29 69 08

The latest Greenpeace report "Pirate Fishing: Plundering West Africa", September 2001, available in [English](#), [French](#) and accompanying factsheet also available in [English](#) and [French](#).

Greenpeace report “Pirate Fishing plundering the oceans” - February 2001, available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).

Archive Expedition web sites:

[Atlantic](#)

[Southern Ocean](#)

NOTES TO EDITORS:

(1) The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing was approved by consensus by the FAO Committee on Fisheries on 2 March 2001 and endorsed by the FAO Council on 23 June 2001. The plan of action requires States to provide aid to developing countries.

Part V (art 85-86) of the FAO international plan of action on the "Special requirements of developing countries" requires that "States, with the support of FAO and relevant international financial institutions and mechanisms, where appropriate, should co-operate to support training and capacity building and consider providing financial, technical and other assistance to developing countries, including in particular the least developed among them and small island developing States, so that they can more fully meet their commitments under the IPOA and obligations under international law, including their duties as flag States and port States. Such assistance should be directed in particular to help such States in the development and implementation of national plans of action in accordance with paragraph 25."

(2) A "flag of convenience" country is one that allows fishing vessels to operate under its flag without ensuring that they abide by international rules. Such flags are used by fishing boat owners/companies to avoid fisheries conservation and management regulations as well as safety/labour standards. Although some of these FOC countries are members of the relevant regional fisheries organisations, they consistently fail to take responsibility for ensuring that their flagged vessels obey all of the rules and regulations.

(3) Over the past four years, the UN has adopted four resolutions calling for an end to "unauthorised" fishing on the high seas and in the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of developing countries.