



EUROPEAN UNION MINISTERS DISCUSS FUNDING OF PIRATE FISHING

27 November 2001

Brussels - Some 31 fishing trawlers and three fish transport vessels operating outside of any legal control and plundering fish stocks have been sighted by Greenpeace off the coast of West Africa, where they are fishing for the most valuable species. In the process of catching prawns, cephalopods, sole, tens of other species are killed and discarded. The international environmental organisation published new data today which was gathered during September 2001, when the vessel MV Greenpeace sailed off the coasts of Guinea Conakry and Sierra Leone for a second documenting expedition.(1) Nine of these fishing vessels had already been sighted fishing illegally by regional surveillance flights.(2) Ten are flagged in Belize, a notorious flag-of-convenience(FOC)country.(3)

“These pirate trawlers continue to fish ignoring international regulations, some of them sailing without identity or flag, with their identity hidden or with two names. Between the 7th and the 14th of September, in only one week, we caught 31 of them,” said Helene Bours of Greenpeace. “In these regions, effective control and legal enforcement are non-existent, so these vessels trawl the bottom of the sea, catching species indiscriminately and leaving a marine desert behind them.”

Greenpeace has been campaigning for years against pirate fishing, a global phenomenon which affects many regions of the world, but primarily developing countries. Not only does pirate fishing destroy the marine environment, it also jeopardises the livelihood of local fishing communities. Incursions by trawlers in coastal areas, they sometime operate less than one nautical mile from the coast, and sometimes even in the estuaries of rivers, often result in collisions with local canoes and many fishermen are killed. Pirate fishing also deprives developing coastal states from much needed earnings.

In the developing world, pirate vessels take advantage of some countries' lack of resources to patrol their waters and control fishing activities. Guinea Conakry is a particularly vulnerable example. Unlike Mauritania and Senegal, it does not have any patrol planes or boats, while its neighbour Sierra Leone is in an even worse situation as pirates take advantage of their war. “Pirate fishing is one of the pernicious results of a situation of exacerbated competition in the fishing industry. As industrialised countries see their fish stocks decrease and impose stricter control measures in their waters, fishing companies and boat owners find ways to evade the constraints, and displace their destructive activities to areas where effective control is absent to continue to supply consumers with their favourite seafood,” added Bours.

The European Union, as one of the major fishing powers and markets in the world, must face its responsibilities as far as its ports, such as Las Palmas, markets, companies and fleets are concerned. It also has the duty to help developing countries fight illegal fishing. Greenpeace calls on the EU to:

- close ports to pirate fishing and support vessels
 - close its market to pirate-caught fish;
 - close or otherwise prevent companies and nationals from owning or operating FOC fishing and support vessels;and
 - extend financial support to developing countries for fisheries activities control through EU Development and Co-operation policy, with particular attention to the regional dimension of control operations.
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Download the report [Witnessing the Plunder](#) (pdf) and the [Appendix 1](#) (a list of fishing vessels sighted in Sierra Leone, Guinea Conakry and Guinea Bissau during the MV Greenpeace Expedition in September 2001) for more information.

Notes: (1) In April and May 2000, Greenpeace documented fishing by tuna fishing vessels flying flags of convenience in international waters off Angola. Following Greenpeace's report, measures to combat these activities are now being taken mainly by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) as well as some individual governments, such as South Africa and Japan. In the European Union (EU), Spain has started to tackle the problem and has adopted new legislation to discourage their citizens from working on board flag of convenience (FOC) fishing vessels. The EU itself is considering prohibiting the use of public funds to transfer EU owned fishing vessels to FOC countries.

Eight fishing vessels and two reefers are FOC vessels registered in Belize and one mother-ship in Panama.

Two fishing vessels had no name. Two fishing vessels had two names. Two fishing vessels had the same name. Twenty-seven vessels displayed no country or port of registry.

(2) Nine fishing vessels had been sighted previously engaged in illegal operations by the sub-regional aerial surveillance.

(3) See Lloyds Maritime Information Services - updated October 2001. It is interesting to note that Belize and some other FOC countries, such as Honduras, responding to growing international pressure, are in the process of expelling embarrassing fishing vessels from their registries. Unfortunately, new FOCs countries are emerging, such as Bolivia, where those vessels find another haven. To put an end to pirate fishing, a wide range of measures must be adopted and enforced, based on existing international instruments.