New Announcement on the Issuance of a Seaman Book for Thai and Migrant Workers

On 14 September 2016, the Office of the Prime Minister of Thailand issued an "Announcement on the Issuance of a Seaman Book B.E. 2559 (2016)", to lay out procedures for the issuance of a seaman book for Thai and migrant workers employed on a fishing vessel (vessels greater than 30GT or greater than 10GT that use trawl nets, surrounding nets and anchovy falling nets). For the first time, migrant workers over 18 years of age and employed on a Thai fishing vessel will be issued an identity paper similar to that of their Thai peers. This new Announcement is an important step towards a major labour reform in the Thai fisheries sector.

Details of this new Announcement is as follows:

1. **The Marine Department will be the responsible authority to issue a seaman book to Thai workers employed on a Thai fishing vessel:**

   Vessel owners who wish to hire a Thai national must make arrangements for their new hire to apply for a seaman book at a regional office of the Marine Department. For Thai seamen currently working without a seaman book, vessel owners must make arrangements for them to apply for a seaman book at a regional office of the Marine Department within 120 days from 15 September 2016.

2. **The Fisheries Department will be the responsible authority to issue a seaman book to migrant workers employed on a Thai fishing vessel:**

   Vessel owners who wish to hire a migrant worker must make arrangements to bring their new hire to apply for a seaman book at a PIPO Center (or other designated places as stipulated in the Announcement). For migrant workers currently working on a Thai fishing vessel without a seaman book, vessel owners must make arrangements for them to apply for a seaman book at a PIPO Center (or other designated places as stipulated in the Announcement) within 120 days from 15 September 2016.

   The required documents for such applications are (1) a copy of migrant worker’s work permit, (2) a copy of vessel owner’s fishing license and (3) a copy of employment contract to work on fishing vessel. Vessel owners must bring the applicant to the designated place to be photographed, fingerprinted and interviewed (one-on-one to pre-screen those who may fall victim to forced labour, debt bondage or trafficking). The applicant’s biographical background will also be recorded and kept on file. If the application is approved, the vessel owner must bring the applicant to collect the seaman book at the designated place.

   Should a migrant worker wish to work on a different fishing vessel or should there be a change of vessel ownership, the migrant worker or the new vessel owner must report these changes and amend the details on their seaman book.

This new measure is a part of the Thai Government’s genuine efforts to help protect migrant workers in the fisheries sector from falling victim to exploitation and abuse by the vessel owner.

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Department of European Affairs,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
20 September 2016