

Guidelines on keeping illegally caught fish from global supply chains near 'finish line' – UN agency

12 April 2017 – A push to establish internationally-agreed standards to keep illegally caught fish off store-shelves and consumers' plates has taken an important step forward, the United Nations agricultural agency, said today as a measure aiming to create a "gold standard" for catch documentation nears the finish line.

"A set of draft Voluntary Guidelines on Catch Documentation Schemes was last week unanimously adopted by a FAO [technical consultation](#) that brought a five-year negotiation effort to a close, and are now poised for adoption by all UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) members at [its] upcoming bi-annual governing conference," the agency said in a [news release](#).

Once approved by the Conference, which will take place in Rome from 3 to 8 July, the guidelines will act as an internationally-recognized "gold standard" reference for governments and businesses looking to establish systems that can trace fish from their point of capture through the entire supply chain, in other words from "sea-to-plate," to stop illegally caught fish from entering the marketplace.

Globally, some 91-93 million tonnes of fish are captured each year, and seafood products are among the world's most widely traded food commodities – with a \$142 billion export value in 2016.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is also estimated to strip as much as 26 million additional tonnes of fish from the oceans annually, damaging marine ecosystems and sabotaging efforts to sustainably manage fisheries.



Fish caught in the Seychelles. Photo: UNEP GRID Arendal/Lawrence Hislop

Catch documentation schemes (CDS) offer a way to cut down on trade in illegal fish with basically ensuring that: fish shipments are certified by national authorities as being caught legally and in compliance with best practices; certified hard-copy documentation accompanies the fish through processing and marketing nationally or internationally. Only fish with valid documentation can be exported or traded to markets where a CDS requirement exists.

Until recently, the few such schemes that had been established mainly focused on overexploited high-value species, such as Chilean Seabass harvested in Antarctic waters, or Atlantic and Southern Bluefin Tuna.

With seafood trade at record highs along with rising consumer demands, CDS

could be more widely applied. Since 2010, the European Union has used a CDS that covers all imported fish shipments from overseas; and in 2016, the United States announced its own scheme.

International buy-in critical

One challenge facing broader use of CDS is logistically ensuring that a paper certificate safely makes it from a fishing port in one country to an inspection station in another. The new guidelines recommend that fish shipment information be recorded digitally for referencing at any point along the chain – reducing administrative burdens and cutting down on fraud opportunities.

The new guidelines also call for “user friendly” CDS that are relatively simple and can be adapted to different fisheries circumstances.

“CDS will only succeed if there is strong, international coordination,” explains Audun Lem, Deputy-Director of FAO’s Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Resources Division and current Secretary of FAO’s Sub-Committee on Fish Trade.

“Although they are voluntary, the process of negotiation that led to the new guidelines means they enjoy a high level of buy-in by governments, while endorsement at the FAO Conference will send a clear signal of commitment to adhere to them. So, going forward, new catch documentation schemes established at the national, regional or international level will be in sync, reducing barriers to their wider use,” he underscored.

Additionally, Mr. Lem added that because the guidelines call on countries to comply with existing international laws as well as World Trade Organization agreements, their developing CDS will allow countries to avoid unwanted trade disputes.

[With millions in Yemen on brink of famine, situation ‘close to a breaking point,’ warns UN agency](#)

12 April 2017 – The United Nations World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) is scaling up its emergency operations in war-torn Yemen to provide urgently needed food assistance to some nine million people, the agency said today.

“We are in a [race against time](#) to save lives and prevent a full-scale famine unfolding in the country, but we urgently need resources to do this,” said the WFP Representative and Country Director in Yemen, Stephen Anderson.

The new emergency operation will require up to \$1.2 billion over a one-year period and should allow WFP to gradually scale up assistance to feed all severely food insecure people in Yemen every month. The success of this operation hinges on immediate sufficient resources from donors.

“The situation is getting close to a breaking point in Yemen with unprecedented levels of hunger and food insecurity. Millions of people can no longer survive without urgent food assistance,” said Mr. Anderson continued.

With the new plan, WFP aims to provide vital food assistance to nearly seven million people classified as severely food insecure, in addition to nutrition support to prevent or treat malnutrition among 2.2 million children. WFP will also assist breastfeeding and pregnant mothers with specialized nutritious foods.

Until it can secure the funds that it needs, WFP will prioritize 6.7 million people for urgent food assistance. Some 2.5 million of them – particularly those in governorates hardest-hit by food insecurity – will receive a package of assistance aimed at averting famine.

This will include a full food ration, which will cover 100 per cent of the food needs of every member of a family for a month, in addition to nutrition support for malnourished children and women. This is the first time that WFP has been able to provide a full food basket in more than a year.

A second priority group of 4.2 million people will receive a reduced food ration, which comprises 60 per cent of the full food basket.

“We have to secure urgent resources to meet the needs of all nine million people who are severely food insecure in Yemen as well as the millions of malnourished children and women,” added Mr. Anderson. “Until we are able to do this, we have to spread out what we have to ensure that we are helping the people who are at the most immediate risk of starvation.”

WFP prioritizes its assistance in consultation with humanitarian partners targeting people in highest priority governorates and districts, which are already showing signs of famine-like conditions – especially in Taiz, Hodeidah, Lahj, Abyan and Sa’ada.

Global trade to expand by 2.4 per cent in 2017 amid ‘deep’ geopolitical, economic uncertainty – WTO

12 April 2017 – While forecasting that growth in the volume of global merchandise trade is expected to rebound this year from its weak performance

in 2016, the World Trade Organization ([WTO](#)) today cautioned that “deep uncertainty” about near-term economic and policy developments in some countries raise the risk that trade activity could be stifled.

The WTO, which often cooperates with the United Nations on trade matters, [forecast](#) that global trade will expand by 2.4 per cent in 2017, but only if the global economy recovers as expected and governments pursue the right policy mix. Owing to this uncertainty, this figure is placed within a range of 1.8 per cent to 3.6 per cent. In 2018, the WTO is forecasting trade growth between 2.1 per cent and four per cent.

The unpredictable direction of the global economy in the near term and the lack of clarity about government action on monetary, fiscal and trade policies raises the risk that trade activity will be stifled. A spike in inflation leading to higher interest rates, tighter fiscal policies and the imposition of measures to curtail trade could all undermine higher trade growth over the next two years, said the WTO.

“Weak international trade growth in the last few years largely reflects continuing weakness in the global economy,” said WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo on the launch of the organization’s 2017-2018 forecasts, adding that trade has the potential to strengthen global growth if the movement of goods and supply of services across borders remains largely unfettered.

However, if policymakers attempt to address job losses at home with severe restrictions on imports, trade cannot help boost growth and may even constitute a drag on the recovery, he continued.

‘We need to keep using trade to deliver more benefits to more people’ – WTO chief

Picking up that thread in a press conference earlier today in Geneva, he said that overall, while there are some reasons for [cautious optimism](#), trade growth remains fragile and there are considerable risks to the downside. Much of the uncertainty around the outlook is of course political – and not only geopolitical. Part of this is driven by people’s concerns about the impact that trade can have.

The fact is that trade plays a very beneficial role in the economy overall. It is net positive. It drives growth, job creation and development, he said, but stressed: “Nevertheless, people’s concerns cannot be ignored. A net gain for the economy as a whole – or for other individuals – means little to someone who has lost their job. But in finding the right response we have to look at the whole picture.”

Mr. Azevêdo said that the fact is that the economy is changing fast – driven by technology and innovation. Eight in 10 manufacturing jobs are lost to innovative technologies and higher productivity. It is estimated that 65 per cent of children entering primary school today will end up working in types of jobs that don’t yet exist.

Closing the borders to trade would only worsen the situation – it would not bring the jobs back, it would make more jobs disappear

“We have to adapt to this new reality. That means applying the right mix of policies across a range of areas. At the domestic level, policies are needed to help support the workers of today and train the workers of tomorrow,” he said, underscoring: Closing the borders to trade would only worsen the situation – it would not bring the jobs back, it would make more jobs disappear.”

He called for measures to keep using trade to deliver more benefits to more people. More trade integration can help make the system more inclusive – connecting new industries and smaller players to new markets.

[On International Day, UN celebrates historic event that opened doors to outer space](#)

12 April 2017 – The United Nations today commemorated the International Day of Human Space Flight to celebrate the 56th anniversary of the first human space flight, which ushered in the beginning of the space era for mankind.

“The International Day is an opportunity for us to recognize how much humanity has achieved thanks to international cooperation in space and the benefits space technology and applications has brought us for making the world a better place,” said the UN Champion for Space, Scott Kelly in a message on the occasion.

The [International Day](#) commemorates the historic space flight that Yuri Gagarin, a Soviet citizen, took on 12 April, 1961, and which opened the way for space exploration for the benefit of all of Earth’s inhabitants.

This year’s commemoration features a live “Twitter Chat” with Mr. Kelly, a former astronaut with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), who holds the record for the most cumulative number of days spent in space by an American astronaut.

During his “year in space,” astronaut Kelly and NASA partnered with the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (OOSA) on the #WhySpaceMatters campaign to draw attention to the importance of space-based science technology and their applications for sustainable development.

In 2011, the UN General Assembly declared 12 April as the International Day of Human Space Flight “to celebrate each year at the international level the beginning of the space era for mankind, reaffirming the important contribution of space science and technology in achieving sustainable development goals and increasing the well-being of States and peoples, as well as ensuring the realization of their aspiration to maintain outer space

for peaceful purposes.”

The Assembly expressed its deep conviction of the common interest of mankind in promoting and expanding the exploration and use of outer space, as the province of all mankind, for peaceful purposes and in continuing efforts to extend to all States the benefits derived there from.

VIDEO: International Day of Human Space Flight

'Alarming' rise in use of children in 'suicide' attacks by Boko Haram in Lake Chad region – UNICEF

12 April 2017 – The use of children, particularly girls, by the Boko Haram terrorist group in violent attacks in the Lake Chad region has seen an “alarming” surge in 2017, the United Nations Children’s Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has reported.

According to the UNICEF report, [Silent Shame: Bringing out the voices of children caught in the Lake Chad crisis](#), 27 children have been used to carry out bomb attacks in public places across Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon in the first quarter of this year. During the same period last year, the number was nine.

“In the first three months of this year, the number of children used in bomb attacks is nearly the same as the whole of last year – this is the worst possible use of children in conflict,” the UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Marie-Pierre Poirier, said in a news release [announcing the grim findings](#).

“These children are victims, not perpetrators. Forcing or deceiving them into committing such horrific acts is reprehensible.”

Since 2014, 117 children – more than 80 per cent of them girls – have been used in ‘suicide’ attacks across the region. As a result of this distressing tactic, girls, boys and even infants have been viewed with increasing fear at markets and checkpoints, where they are thought to carry explosives.

Fear of stigma pushing children into isolation

The UNICEF report documents troubling accounts by children who were held in captivity by Boko Haram and narrates the deep suspicion they are met with when they return to their communities.

[Children] bear their horrors in silent shame and endure isolation as they remove themselves from other groups for fear they might be outed and alienated even further UNICEF report *Silent Shame*

Many children who have been associated with armed groups keep their experience secret because they fear the stigmatization and even violent reprisals from their community, the report noted. They bear their horrors in silent shame and endure isolation as they remove themselves from other groups for fear they might be outed and alienated even further.

The report also highlights the challenges local authorities face with children who have been intercepted at checkpoints and taken into administrative custody for questioning and screening, including for prolonged periods.

VIDEO: Surge in girls being used in Boko Haram 'suicide' attacks / UNICEF

Voicing concern over such custodies and that, last year, nearly 1,500 children were under administrative custody in the four countries, UNICEF has called on Governments to urgently transfer them to civilian authorities for reintegration and support, and to put in place handover protocols to handle children encountered during military operations.

All children affected by the crisis need psychosocial support and safe spaces to recover, said UNICEF, highlighting the particular need to pay attention to the care and protection of separated and unaccompanied children.

It also underlined that Boko Haram must end grave violations against children, including the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict as so-called suicide bombers.

At the same time, UNICEF continues to provide support to the children and families.

Last year, it reached more than 312,000 children with psychosocial support and reunited more than 800 children with their families in the four countries. It is also working with communities and families to fight stigma against survivors of sexual violence and to build a protective environment for former abducted children.

However, its response in the region remains severely underfunded. Last year, its \$154 million appeal was only 40 per cent funded.