

CAPTURE CHANGE STORY**MDC: Mission
for Humanity**

We have found that Thai law itself is quite efficient, while law enforcement is the problem. So, our organization is determined to support workers, employers, and also the state government.

– SUMANA, COORDINATOR AT THE MIGRANT DEVELOPMENT CENTER (MDC), SURAT THANI.

Starting from small scale traditional fishing, the fisheries in Thailand have swiftly grown into commercial fishing since 1960, due to advanced technology and a high demand for seafood products in the international market.

However, many Thai workers refuse to work in fishing vessels and consider it to be a dirty, difficult, and dangerous job. To solve the labor scarcity problem in the fishing industry, Thailand has consequently needed to rely on migrant workers from neighboring countries.

In 2015, the Thai fishing sector received a yellow card from the European Union due to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (IUU). Therefore, Thailand has attempted to improve fisheries governance to combat IUU.

“Migrant workers in the past had no work potential, skill, nor knowledge. After IUU fishing issues, they have obtained a better chance to learn, better quality of life, and better treatment from employers. Thailand could not survive without migrant workers,” said Sompian, Coordinator at the MDC, Surat Thani

The MDC, a part of Diocesan Social Action of Surat Thani Catholic Foundation (DISAC), assists migrant workers who live in Phuket, not only in the fishing industry, but in all business sectors.

“The MDC tries to prevent and suppress human trafficking. We also educate both workers and employers about their rights. So, they can access legal aid and be protected. This is mainly what the does,” said Sumana, Coordinator at MDC, Surat Thani.

The MDC plays an important role which can be separated into two parts: 1) provide direct assistance to migrants, and 2) assist migrants in filing complaints and providing referrals to government sectors.

“Our mission is to coordinate with relevant state sectors who are authorized to enforce the law. We consider the suitable organization for each case; for example, labor protection, labor employment, or labor in fisheries,” Sumana added.

Soe Lwin, 48, a construction worker in Phuket, had tried to contact the MDC after he had a problem with his employer. He was eventually moved to new construction site.

“Actually, I planned to return home. However, when I met the MDC staff, I asked if I could keep working here. Then, they assisted me to continue my work as I wanted. I am so happy,” Soe Lwin expressed.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has impacted various business sectors in Phuket and has resulted in migrant worker job loss as high as 70 percent. Nonetheless, Kyaw Naing, 42, secured his job with help from the MDC.

“Tan Lwin from the MDC asked us whether we want to return home or continue working here since the MDC could help looking for a new job. Without the MDC, I had no idea about other organizations and I might have ended up coming back to my home country. Luckily enough, we called the MDC and got help from Tan Lwin to stay here,” Kyaw Naing confirmed.

Many migrant workers had been infected with the virus at that time. Government sectors and social organizations both local and international lent them a hand by providing food and temporary shelter, while the MDC and DISAC provided targeted support to vulnerable families, especially women and children who wanted to be repatriated.

“I am so proud of it. Greater than giving some food or temporary shelter, they could return to the safe place in their own homeland where they can continue their kid’s education and keep moving their lives forward. I am very impressed.” Sumana shared her feeling

Despite the fact that migrant workers’ situations have worsened due to COVID-19, Sompien and Sumana, have carried on this mission for humanity to support migrant workers and their families. Assuring the migrant community that they will always have friends to rely on here.

“I think everyone involved needs to discuss this problem together, seriously and sincerely, to figure out how to solve it. I think it is possible,” Sompien raised

“I would like to encourage everyone since we are exhausted from having been through a couple years under COVID-19. Some were parted from family, while some lost their loved ones. I would like to support you to keep on fighting,” Sumana concluded