



SEARCH strengthens legal and institutional mechanisms for the promotion and the protection of the rights of children, ethnic minorities and migrant workers in Southeast Asia. Working with three regional partners, as well as national civil society organizations, the project encompasses seven countries: Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Laos and Timor Leste.

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HUMAN TRAFFICKING: BATHEA'S STORY HOW SEARCH HELPS

Bathea was 19 years old when he left Cambodia and his family to take up employment in Thailand. Faced with no job prospects and few opportunities, he decided to accept an offer from someone in a nearby village to go to Thailand and work in a factory that processed seafood. He was told that the factory treated employees well and that he could earn 17,000 riel (around USD \$4) per day. He was also told that he would need to pay a fee of 300 000 riel (around USD \$70) to an employment broker, who would make all of the arrangements.

Bathea was excited by the prospect of an income that he could send back to his family in Cambodia but he could only raise a portion of the fee the broker was asked for. The broker agreed to loan Bathea the 100,000 shortfall on the condition that he repay it over the course of his employment. Bathea accepted.

The journey from Cambodia to Thailand took several days. Bathea lost track of where he was. The faces around him changed often and he was passed from broker to broker before he finally arrived, exhausted, but keen to start working in the factory.



Bathea was not taken to a factory as promised. He was taken to a port in and told that his job would be to fish on a boat and repair fishing nets. He looked around at the other crew members, noticing that there were many other Cambodians, as well as Thais. He learned from these crew members that some had known before they arrived in Thailand that they would be working on a boat, while others had been promised different kinds of work, like Bathea.

The work was hard. They started fishing at 4pm and worked through the night. When they finally stopped at 9 the next morning, they would repair the fishing nets, often having no rest before starting the routine again at 4pm.

The work was relentless. Many times Bathea saw the captain and his men beat those who were too sick or tired to work. At every moment, the lives of Bathea and the other fishermen were under the strict control of the captain. Bathea hated every minute of work, but felt too afraid of the captain to speak out. He watched as others complained and were forced to work for several days or more without a break.



After one month at sea, Bathea's boat returned to the port to empty the caught fish from its hold. Bathea asked the captain for his wages but was told that whatever he had earned had already been paid to the broker who recruited him, and that this would be the arrangement until his debt was paid.

This was Bathea's life for many months. Every time the boat would dock, he would try to recover some wages, but to no avail. He was trapped on a boat that had become a working prison.

Bathea felt he had no way out. He would look out to sea, knowing the dangers he faced from both the work and from those who forced it upon him. He thought about how difficult his life was and for what? He still had no wages to send home. He began to feel that his only alternative was to

escape, and risk the consequences. He and some of the other crew members watched and waited for an opportunity to disappear into the crowds of dockworkers and when the chance arose, they fled.

Bathea had no money, no transport, and no connection to any life on land. He could barely communicate with the local people, and didn't know who to turn to for help. Luckily, one of the others who escaped with him managed to call his family in Cambodia. His family then contacted the human rights organization LICADHO – the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights - and told them the story of the escaped fishermen.

LICADHO staff rescued Bathea and the others, and helped them return home to Cambodia. As he spoke to the people from LICADHO, Bathea was told that he had been a victim of human trafficking, a crime under Cambodian law. Bathea had never heard of human trafficking, and had no idea that it could happen to him.

Bathea is now back home, working on his parent's farm. His physical health has improved a lot, but the emotional scars from his trafficking experience will take much longer to heal. Through the legal non-government organization LSCW - Legal Support for Children and Women – he has been able to take action to recover compensation from the broker who recruited him, and his case is currently before the courts.

LSCW provides legal assistance and support through trained Cambodian lawyers to victims of human trafficking, and also undertakes activities that promote gender quality and respect for human rights. LICADHO investigates human rights violations and provides victims with medical assistance, rehabilitation services and rights awareness training. Its Human Rights Education Office provides training courses to government officials, police, students and monks, as well as members of the general public.

The United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking provides financial support and training to both of these NGOs, to help them expand and improve the services they offer to victims of human trafficking. UNIAP's main role is to coordinate efforts in the Mekong region to help stop human trafficking, in collaboration with the six governments of the Mekong countries – Cambodia, China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.

UNIAP has forged close ties with LICADHO, LSCW and many other NGOs in each of the Mekong countries who are working to help prevent the crime of human trafficking, prosecute trafficking offenders and protect victims. With support from SEARCH, UNIAP is able to provide training, financial support and rapid case assistance on the ground to these NGOs and others in the region. Such support ensures that these NGOs can continue their important work to stop human trafficking, and help people like Bathea.

For more information on UNIAP, please visit: www.no-trafficking.org

For more information on LICADHO, please visit: <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/>

For more information on LSCW, please visit: <http://www.lscw.org/>