

# Vatican officials address difficult conditions of seafarers

VATICAN CITY – Vatican officials have called for greater church attention to the more than 30 million seafarers around the world, who often live and work in hazardous conditions.

Of the 30 million, half are working full time on board fishing vessels under challenging marine conditions that cause high rates of accidents and fatalities, the church experts said. In many countries, fishing is the most hazardous occupation, they said.

“Even though seafarers serve daily needs of the planet and habitants, they are almost invisible workers who are often isolated in the port area because of new restrictive rules,” said Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, secretary of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers.

The restrictions include extremely tight security measures placed on sea workers when they arrive in ports and want to go to shore, Vatican officials said at a meeting Feb. 10 of the Apostleship of the Sea, which operates under the migration council.

Archbishop Marchetto said an overriding problem for sea workers today is global fish depletion. According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, out of the world’s 15 main fishing regions, four are depleted and nine are in decline.

“Hundreds of millions of people traditionally dependent on fishing for food and livelihoods face resource depletion, competition from industrial and distant water fleets, and loss of access to traditional marine food supplies,” the archbishop said.

The Apostleship of the Sea can help in improving the traditional ways in which the fishing sector is organized by helping to form new leadership among younger people, and promoting a deeper respect for the dignity of fishers, he said.

Archbishop Antonio Maria Veglio, president of the migrants and travelers council, said another problem is the decline in financial aid of charitable organizations for

welfare activities aimed at seafarers. He said the global economic crisis has forced many centers for seafarers to close or significantly reduce their activities.

The church should look at new ways to promote ecumenical cooperation by sharing resources and working more effectively with civilian maritime organizations, he said.