



ROYAL DANISH DEFENCE COLLEGE



FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ
ISSUED AT THE MARITIME DIALOGUE PLATFORM V ON THE THEME:
‘ENHANCING COOPERATION IN THE MARITIME DOMAIN
BETWEEN THE FISHING INDUSTRY AND MARITIME AUTHORITIES,
HELD IN ACCRA, GHANA ON 7TH JUNE 2023

1. Preamble

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC) Zone F and the Centre for Stabilisation (CFS) at the Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC) convened the fifth Maritime Dialogue Platform (MDP V) to discuss the prominence of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and its impact on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, on 7th June 2023; funded by the Danish Peace and Stabilisation Fund’s (PSF) Maritime Security Programme (MSP) for the Gulf of Guinea (2022-2026).

Distinguished participants at the MDP V seminar included Ghana’s Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development, representatives of maritime authorities from the Yaoundé Architecture, civilian and military national maritime authorities, fishing industry associations, information-sharing platforms, academia, and commercial shipping lines.

2. Development of the Communiqué

The final communiqué was generated from presentations, discussions, conclusions and recommendations regarding the prevalence, threats and trends in IUU fishing in the Gulf of Guinea. It focused on the necessity of national and regional collaboration and cooperation in addressing IUU fishing, in particular, and crimes at sea, in general, and the actual and potential roles of maritime authorities and the fishing industry in safeguarding the Gulf of Guinea from IUU fishing. The discussions were conducted under the broad theme of ‘Enhancing Cooperation in the Maritime Domain between the Fishing Industry and Maritime Authorities’ and the following sub-themes:

- Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea: Regional State of IUU Fishing in the Gulf;
- Current State of IUU fishing in the Gulf of Guinea;
- Experiences from the National Fisheries Association of Ghana;



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- Regional Cooperation between Maritime Authorities and the Fishing Communities in ECOWAS; and
- An Insight into Experiences with IUU Fishing in Zone E.

3. The Communiqué

The following observations and recommendations were made during the MDP V seminar:

3.1 The Context

1. This year, 2023, marks the 10th anniversary of adopting the Yaoundé Architecture for maritime security, which provides a framework for countries within the Gulf of Guinea to deter and address various threats to the maritime space. It forms part of a larger collection of international, regional and national interventions, including legislation, regulations, plans of action, institutions, platforms and taskforces, to address crimes at sea. Yet, these crimes persist and in certain instances such as with IUU fishing, increase. This situation is due in part to the prioritisation of piracy and robbery-at-sea in national, regional and international responses, loopholes within and between these interventions, weak penalties and enforcement capacities, lack of or limited engagement with fisherfolk and coastal communities, and inadequate integration, coordination, collaboration and cooperation with respect to frameworks, responses and information-sharing between and at international, regional, sub-regional and national levels; thereby, highlighting challenges with trust, political will, and transparency at and between these levels.
2. Overfishing and the depletion of fish stocks to which IUU fishing is a contributor has risen to an alarming level with the risk of the near extinction of certain aqua species, destruction of marine biodiversity and ecosystems, food insecurity with possible resultant social instability, and loss of livelihoods for fisherfolk, fishmongers, coastal communities in general and others reliant on the fishing industry's value chain, including women and their families.
3. Still, despite these detrimental effects of IUU fishing and all the frameworks and systems put in place to combat it, it appears that many actors do not regard IUU fishing as an existential transnational maritime security threat. This includes local coastal communities, fisherfolk, industrial trawlers, general populations, national governments and regional



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bodies in the Gulf of Guinea until its severity is impressed on national leaders by overseas trading and development partners or, potentially, when the damage done to marine ecosystems and stock proves irreversible. And in the responses proffered to address IUU fishing, it seems that firstly, the diversity of those within and affected by the crimes at sea is viewed narrowly by maritime authorities; thus, restricting or barring the participation of members of the fishing industry, such as fisherfolk, coastal communities and the private sector; and secondly, that the borderless nature of the sea is not fully appreciated and, in turn, neither is the indispensability of regional and international joint responses in countering this threat in territorial waters.

3.2 The Recommendations

The following recommendations were put forward by participants of the MDP V seminar regarding the way forward in countering IUU fishing in the Gulf of Guinea and on cooperation between the fishing industry and maritime authorities:

1. National and regional authorities in the Gulf of Guinea should accord the same level of urgency to addressing overfishing and the depletion of fish stocks, especially via IUU fishing, as that given to combatting piracy and robbery at sea. And accordingly, they should provide the requisite human, financial, technical and material resources and investments to counter this crime and foster greater and meaningful collaboration, cooperation, and sharing of data, information, lessons learnt, and experiences, at national and regional levels, between governmental bodies, the security sector, fishing communities, non-governmental organisations (NGO), the private sector, academia, and the media.
2. Maritime authorities and stakeholders should raise awareness within their general population on the definition of IUU fishing and its negative (and potential) impact on food security, economic livelihoods, state security, aquatic biodiversity and the marine environment. This could be achieved by educating media outlets on IUU fishing to enable them to understand the challenges of and responses to this threat, and in turn, accurately educating the population at large.
3. Maritime authorities should engage fisherfolk and coastal communities to gain their insights on the root causes of and trends in IUU fishing, to solicit their cooperation and collaboration in surveillance and diligence to deter and combat security threats at sea and on land, and to sensitise them on the harmful and domino effects of IUU fishing,



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including the use of unauthorised fishing gear and practices, on their livelihoods, food security, biodiversity, and the safety of their communities.



4. Maritime authorities should also build the capacities of fisherfolk on proper data collection on catch—including specie identification and correct logbook completion—and provide them with the necessary resources to enable them to comply with IUU fishing legislation and regulations.
5. Maritime authorities should provide the same training to both national observers and private operators of trawlers on data collection of catch and related logbook entries and consider introducing appropriate technology for recording and reporting purposes by both sides towards reducing data discrepancies.
6. Maritime authorities should also consult with fishing industry players right from the onset of a review or development of legislation or regulations on the fishing industry.
7. Regional maritime authorities should harmonise international and regional maritime legislation and regulations, in general, and on IUU fishing, in particular.
8. National authorities should domesticate international and regional frameworks and codes of conduct on IUU fishing and/or harmonise these instruments within their national laws. National authorities should also review their existing laws and related implementation plans to ensure there are no gaps or contradictions within and between these instruments, and that effective and enforceable punitive measures, particularly those financially damaging to perpetrators of IUU fishing, are in place. Furthermore, these authorities should also integrate their vessel monitoring systems to those at regional level.
9. The Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC) should expand its mandate to include other stakeholders, such as the fishing industry, and create opportunities for this sector in the sub-region.
10. Neighbouring flag and port states in the Gulf of Guinea should consider regional closed seasons for fishing to avoid cross-border fishing and illegal incursions into national maritime spaces and to encourage the replenishment and increase in fish stocks.
11. Regional and national authorities in the Gulf of Guinea should embrace ownership of interventions to address IUU fishing, initiated with the support of overseas partners, to ensure the sustainability of these interventions. In this vein, Heads of State of regional



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economic communities should empower these bodies to enforce frameworks and impose benchmarks and penalties such as those imposed by the European Union (EU) on African states to counter IUU fishing.

12. With regard to Ghana, specifically, taking into account all the progress and shortcomings in legislation, regulations and implementation of laws to address and deter IUU fishing, there is the need for Ghanaian industry players to change their *modus operandi* at sea and not engage in IUU fishing. These players should also consider sharing ownership of fishing vessels to enhance their profits.
13. All national and regional stakeholders in the Gulf of Guinea should recognise the centrality of trust, transparency and information-sharing in countering all crimes at sea, including IUU fishing; and most importantly, their open, full and meaningful dialogue, collaboration and cooperation at both levels. In this, Member States of the Gulf of Guinea would need to appreciate the importance of curbing IUU fishing to maritime safety and security as envisioned in the plethora of instruments and mechanisms developed and established for this purpose, such as the Yaoundé Architecture. These Member States should also consider IUU fishing as a threat to the attainment of human development objectives as enumerated in the sustainable development goals (SDG). IUU fishing affects the goals that cover preserving underwater life (SDG 14), ending poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2), well-being (SDG 3), and decent work for economic prosperity (SDG 8), as IUU fishing is a threat to marine biodiversity, to the livelihoods of those involved in the fishing industry value chain, to international trade, and national, regional and global food security.

WHEREUPON, We, the under listed, Director of MMCC Zone F, and Special Advisor of RDDC, append our signatures to this Communiqué on the date below:



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Signed on the 14th of June 2023.

SIGNED:

CAPTAIN NOËL OBOUMOU

Director, Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC) Zone F

MR. HÜSEYİN YÜCEL

Special Advisor, Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC)

