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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EJF reveals 'pirate' fishing company catering for star athletes

London: 7th September 2011: The world's top athletes have unknowingly been served food by a Korean company that steals fish from West Africa, the Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) has revealed.

The Inter-Burgo Group, which was the official caterer in the athlete's village at the 2011 World Athletics Championships in Daegu, Korea, is alleged to have been involved in multiple incidents of illegal 'pirate' fishing in West Africa, a practice which devastates marine environments and jeopardises the livelihood and food security of some of the world's poorest people.

As the world's attention was on the World Athletics Championships last week, Inter-Burgo is understood to have paid fines of over USD150,000 to Liberian authorities after one of its large-scale industrial trawlers, the Seta 70, was caught fishing illegally in Liberia's inshore areas reserved for local fishermen. Inter-Burgo is a multinational company that operates fishing fleets, a construction company and a chain of hotels, including the Inter-Burgo Hotel in Daegu which was the headquarters of the governing body of athletics during the World Championships.

The Inter-Burgo owned Seta 70 reportedly tried to avoid capture when detected by the Liberian Coastguard in July by steering erratically and turning off its lights during the night. A Liberian Government fisheries observer on board was reportedly stopped from using communication equipment and was only able to raise the alarm by making a call on his mobile phone whilst hidden in a toilet. The pursuit came to an end when Liberian authorities fired warning shots before boarding the vessel and bringing it to the country's capital Monrovia.

In a separate incident in March, EJF documented the same Inter-Burgo vessel operating illegally in neighbouring Sierra Leone, another country targeted by 'pirate' fishing companies due to weak control of its coastal waters. The Seta 70 is believed to have laundered its catch by illegally transferring or 'transshipping' it to another of the company's vessels, the Panama-flagged Seta No. 73, which then brought it to the port of Las Palmas in the Spanish Canary Islands.

Evidence collected by EJF on the Seta 70 and three other 'pirate' vessels was provided to European authorities, leading in April to the confiscation of an estimated £4 million worth of fish in Las Palmas. This was the largest seizure since the EU introduced a new regulation to end illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in January 2010. The fish all found on board the Inter-Burgo-owned Seta No. 73 is believed to have been caught by vessels that fished in inshore areas, destroyed local fishermen's nets, concealed their markings and attacked a local fisherman.

However, the consignment of suspected 'pirate' fish was subsequently released to the market by Spanish authorities, following months of meetings between port authorities, fishing companies and fish processors. In Spanish media, Korean fishing companies including Inter-Burgo were reported to have threatened to leave the port of Las Palmas if controls on imports of fish from West Africa were not loosened. So far, Spanish authorities and the European Commission have not commented on the release of the illegal fish, which is now circulating within EU markets.



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Meanwhile, Inter-Burgo's Chairman last night confirmed that the group was responsible for the catering in athlete's village at the World Championships but denied that the company's fishing vessels were responsible for illegal fishing in West Africa. There is no suggestion athletes were served stolen fish or that Inter-Burgo hotels were complicit in any illegal activities of the group's fishing vessels.

Steve Trent, Executive Director of EJF said 'EJF's discovery of Inter-Burgo's role as caterer to the world's top athletes shows how vigilant we have to be in the fight against 'pirate' fishing. We urgently need better traceability in order that we avoid unwittingly fuelling this destructive activity, that devastates coastal communities, compromises food security and harms marine environments.'

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Editor's Notes:

- Environmental Justice Foundation is a UK registered charity (no. 1088128) working internationally to protect the environment and defend human rights. EJF has been investigating, documenting and exposing IUU – 'pirate' - fishing since 2004 with a current focus on the negative environmental, social and economic impacts in West Africa, particularly Sierra Leone and Liberia.
- In Sierra Leone, EJF operates a community surveillance patrol vessel to document evidence of illegal trawler activity within the Inshore Exclusion Zone (IEZ) reserved for artisanal fishers.
- Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing is the term given to any fishing activity that contravenes national or international laws, such as using banned fishing gears; targeting protected species; operating in protected or reserved areas or at times when fishing is prohibited; not reporting or misreporting catches; or operating without any sort of permit or license to fish.
- IUU fishing is a global concern and recent studies estimate that illicit catches are worth between US\$10 and US\$23 billion annually. IUU fishing undermines sustainable fisheries management, devastates marine environments and jeopardises the livelihood and food security of some of the world's poorest people.
- Illegal foreign-owned industrial 'pirate' fishing vessels often target developing countries that have little capacity to address the problem. Countries across sub-Saharan Africa are estimated to lose nearly \$1 billion US dollars a year from IUU fishing.
- Over 80 per cent of fish stocks are over exploited, fully exploited or depleted according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) most recent assessments. Scientists have estimated that at current levels of exploitation, most commercial fish stocks could have collapsed by the year 2048.