

Outlaw Ocean reveals ‘crimes at sea’ aboard Chinese fishing vessels

The report states that from 2013 to 2021, ships, mostly Chinese, disembarked a dead body in Montevideo every six weeks or so

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□ A Chinese fishing vessel. (Credit: Shutterstock)

A new report published by The Outlaw Ocean Project in collaboration with *The New Yorker* has claimed to expose abusive labor conditions and lack of oversight in China's distant water fishing industry.

The report comes as The Outlaw Ocean Project published a [separate investigation](#) into the forced transfer of Uyghur people from Xinjiang to work in seafood plants across China. The report, also published in *The New Yorker*, detailed the complex supply chains linking the plants to seafood products sold in the US and Europe.

The latest investigation -- which you can [read in full here](#) -- details the story of Daniel Aritonang, an Indonesian man who died at age 20 after developing beriberi (a deficiency in vitamin B1) on a Chinese fishing vessel.



□ Aritonang on the bridge of the Zhen Fa 7. Credit: Ferdi Armando/The Outlaw Ocean Project

Aritonang left his hometown in Indonesia in 2018 at age 18, hoping to earn money as a deckhand. In September 2019, he flew to Busan, South Korea, where he boarded the Chinese ship Zhen Fa 7 with his friend Hengki Anhar.

Over several months at sea, Aritonang and other Indonesian workers faced harsh conditions and poor treatment, according to the report. In January 2021, Aritonang contracted beriberi. Despite pleas from the crew, the captain allegedly refused medical care as Aritonang's condition worsened.

On March 2, Aritonang was transferred to a tanker ship that took him to Montevideo, Uruguay, where he died six days later. An autopsy found evidence of physical abuse as well as the vitamin B1 deficiency.

The report states that from 2013 to 2021, ships, mostly Chinese, disembarked a dead body in Montevideo every six weeks or so. An interpreter said she assisted hundreds of ailing deckhands in the port city.

Thousands of Indonesians and Chinese work aboard Chinese fishing vessels, typically lured by the promise of lucrative contracts and an escape from poverty or personal difficulties. The Outlaw Ocean Project investigation highlighted the lack of protections for these crew members, who often face debt bondage, physical abuse and exploitation.

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