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Circular Letter No.4204/Add.24
13 July 2020

To: All IMO Member States
United Nations and specialized agencies
Intergovernmental organizations
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO

Subject: **Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Outcome of the International Maritime Virtual Summit on Crew Changes organized by the United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom convened an International Maritime Virtual Summit on 9 July 2020 to address the impact of COVID-19 on crew changes, which was attended by representatives from over a dozen countries. The difficulties ships' crews face across the world was at the centre of the discussions, while all Governments and parties were urged to resolve the issues with maritime transport to support workers and the industry more widely.

During the Summit, 13 Governments from across the world, i.e. Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States, agreed to a *Joint statement of the international maritime virtual summit on crew changes*, set out in the annex, expressing their appreciation to seafarers and pledging to urgently resolve issues concerning them that have arisen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Director-General of ILO supported the outcome of the Summit.¹

Pledges in the joint statement include designating seafarers as key workers; accepting seafarers' ID documents as evidence of their key worker status; implementing the industry approved protocols for ensuring safe ship crew changeover²; reviewing national quarantine restrictions; and increasing access, as soon as possible, to commercial flights to and from the principal countries of origin of seafarers.

The Secretary-General is concerned that more than 200,000 seafarers are still waiting to be repatriated, many having stayed on long beyond the end of their original contracts. A similar number of seafarers are waiting to join ships. He urges Member States to commit to the principles in the joint statement and to disseminate it widely to all parties concerned; and invites Members States wishing to sign the statement to contact the Government of the United Kingdom.³

¹ https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_750510/lang--en/index.htm

² Refer to Circular Letter No.4204/Add.14 on *Recommended Framework of Protocols for ensuring safe ship crew changes and travel during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic*.

³ Maritimeengagement@dft.gov.uk

ANNEX

JOINT STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL MARITIME VIRTUAL SUMMIT ON CREW CHANGES

Our collective efforts to combat the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic have demonstrated the critical need to prioritize the continued functioning of global supply chains to ensure the resilience of our national economies, and the importance of facilitating the safe and efficient operation of the maritime transportation system, which moves over 80% of global trade.

Critical to this endeavour is the ability of shipping companies to continue conducting crew changes throughout the world, notwithstanding the restrictions applied by many national authorities in response to the pandemic.

We, as the representatives of governments attending the International Maritime Virtual Summit on Crew Changes held on 9 July 2020 by the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, are deeply concerned by the global crisis.

Specifically, those created by ongoing obstacles affecting ship's crew changes, the impact on the well-being of seafarers, and the impact that any failure by governments to resolve these issues will have on maritime transport, which must be permitted to continue to operate safely and efficiently throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, we acknowledge, as a matter of urgent concern that:

- the inability of ship operators worldwide to conduct ship's crew changes is the single most pressing maritime operational challenge to the safe and efficient movement of global trade;
- at least 200,000 seafarers are estimated to require immediate repatriation, with many serving on extended crew contracts who are overdue to return home, in addition to a similar number of seafarers that urgently need to join their ships in order to allow the world's internationally trading vessels to continue to operate safely;
- seafarers' tours of duty cannot continue to be extended and need to be kept to a duration of less than 12 months, as set out by the [Maritime Labour Convention \(MLC\) 2006](#), as amended – the global shipping industry estimates that, since March 2020, only about 25% of normal crew changes have taken place; apart from the humanitarian and crew welfare concerns, and issues of regulatory compliance, there is an increasing risk that fatigue and mental health issues could lead to serious maritime accidents;
- the complexity of facilitating ship's crew changes, regardless of the seafarers' nationality, requires concerted action as well as access to commercial flights to the principal seafarer countries of origin and those countries where crew changes take place;
- the health and well-being of seafarers is paramount and is inextricably linked to the continuing safety and efficiency of ship operations;

- the uncertainty around a possible second wave of COVID-19 underscores the need for swift actions without further delay to allow crew changes and to avoid further consequences to the already fragile global supply chain, which relies on goods transported by ships; and
- the lessons learned during the COVID-19 outbreak be used to create international protocols in partnership with the maritime industry and the regulatory agencies, to provide practical instruments to facilitate shipping operations and enable seafarers to perform their essential role, in case of a future global pandemic.

We therefore recognize the importance of the pledges set out below and, as a matter of urgency, to:

- .1 Encourage all International Maritime Organization (IMO) States to designate seafarers as "key workers" providing an essential service, to facilitate a safe and unhindered movement for embarking or disembarking a vessel.
- .2 Consider the legal possibilities for accepting internationally recognized documentation, such as [International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers certificate](#), the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\) Seafarers' Identity Document \(ILO 185\)](#) and a letter by the seafarers' company, carried by seafarers as evidence of their status as key workers, and purpose of their travel and movement for crew changes.
- .3 Engage, nationally, multilaterally and bilaterally, in discussions about implementation, to the maximum extent possible, as appropriate to the circumstances that may prevail nationally or locally, of [the recommended framework of protocols for ensuring safe ship crew changes and travel during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#), circulated to IMO Member States as Circular Letter No.4204/Add.14 on 5 May 2020.
- .4 Review, working in conjunction with our health, immigration and other relevant ministries, agencies and authorities, the necessity of any restrictions that may continue to apply, at national and/or local level, to the movement and travel of seafarers for the purpose of conducting ships' crew changes. This includes the possibility of allowing exemptions from quarantine or similar restrictions in accordance with relevant international rules or health regulatory guidelines.
- .5 Consider, in liaison with our relevant ministries and authorities, including those responsible for immigration, temporary measures including (where possible under relevant law) the possibility of waivers, exemptions or other relaxations from any visa or documentary requirements that might normally apply to seafarers.
- .6 Explore, in cooperation with the International Civil Aviation Organization and the aviation industry, ways of increasing access, as soon as possible, to commercial flights to and from the principal countries of origin of seafarers and the airports in reasonable proximity to those seaports where crew changes are effected.

- .7 Urge all IMO Members to take any necessary measures, within their area of jurisdiction, to ensure seafarers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic enjoy safe crew changes as well as repatriation to their home countries or to their place of ordinary residence.

We express our deepest appreciation to the world's seafarers who have continued tirelessly to operate ships and move trade throughout this global crisis, and pledge to take forward these actions at this summit with the urgency and resolve needed by the situation.

Together, we can avert the global crisis that is unfolding at sea and play our part in helping the world defeat the coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Governments of:

- United Kingdom
- Denmark
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Indonesia
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Philippines
- Saudi Arabia
- Singapore
- United Arab Emirates
- United States of America
