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Circular Letter No.4701  
18 April 2023

To: IMO Members and other Governments  
United Nations and specialized agencies  
Intergovernmental organizations  
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status

Subject: **World Maritime Day 2023**

Further to [Circular Letter No.4677](#) of 10 January 2023, which included a background paper on the year's theme "MARPOL at 50 – Our commitment goes on", the Secretary-General has the honour to enclose herewith the text of his message on the occasion of World Maritime Day 2023. This year's celebration will take place on 28 September 2023.

The message will be available for downloading in all of the Organization's official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) and the background paper is available in the Organization's three working languages (English, French and Spanish). Additionally, a video containing the Secretary-General's message is now available on the IMO website at: <https://www.imo.org/en/About/Events/Pages/World-Maritime-theme-2023.aspx>

The Secretary-General's video message is also available on IMO's YouTube channel (click [here](#) or on the image):



In addition, the Secretary-General wishes to remind all Member States and international organizations of the Calendar of Events on the IMO website, which can be accessed at: [www.imo.org/en/About/Calendar](http://www.imo.org/en/About/Calendar)

The Calendar of Events provides the opportunity for greater visibility of the many events held around the world in support of World Maritime Day and the Day of the Seafarer. It presents an effective and easy-to-use platform to inform other Member States and international organizations, in advance, of maritime-related celebrations, particularly online events that may be more widely attended. More information on the Calendar of Events is enclosed in [Circular Letter No.3889](#)

In order to promote the year's theme, as well as World Maritime Day, more widely, the Secretary-General encourages the authorities concerned to organize suitable events throughout the year and inform the Secretariat of any such activities, including listing them on the calendar as described above.

Social media participation is also encouraged via Twitter, tagging **@IMOHQ** and using the hashtag **#WorldMaritimeTheme** through the year and **#WorldMaritimeDay** for the celebration of the actual Day. Photographs of any events can also be sent to: [media@imo.org](mailto:media@imo.org)

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## **ANNEX**

### **WORLD MARITIME THEME FOR 2023 MARPOL AT 50 – OUR COMMITMENT GOES ON**

#### **A message from Kitack Lim Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization**

Today, shipping delivers over 80% of world trade and carries millions of passengers to destinations across the globe. Maritime transport continues to be the safest, and most energy-efficient mode of transport. Shipping is a crucial part of the global supply chain. This is a certainty, even in uncertain times.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is fulfilling its role as the global regulator for shipping ensuring that the maritime sector delivers cargo safely and in an environmentally sustainable manner.

The voyage towards an environmentally sound shipping sector started over 50 years ago. At the time the world recognized the need to protect our planet and, in particular, the marine environment from all sources of pollution. A number of maritime pollution incidents were a strong catalyst for action.

Against this background, IMO decided to adopt a treaty to prevent pollution from ships into the marine environment: the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships – or MARPOL.

Over time, the IMO Member States expanded MARPOL's coverage starting from accidental and operational oil spills from tankers to the prevention of pollution from chemicals carried in bulk, packaged dangerous goods, sewage and garbage, and ultimately, the prevention of air pollution from ships.

This year we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of this landmark environmental treaty.

To mark this special occasion, our World Maritime Theme for 2023 is "MARPOL at 50 – our commitment goes on".

Through these decades, MARPOL has constantly advanced to keep up with lessons learned and new demands – such as the imperative to tackle climate change and to accommodate new technology.

Its rules are continuously upgraded as we look to a sustainable future and enhance the protection of our planet and ocean.

MARPOL has had a positive impact on the marine environment. It has changed how ships – like this one – are designed and operated. The number of oil spills fell by over 90% over the last 50 years due to this and other targeted interventions.

Thanks to MARPOL, the discharge of plastic garbage into the sea is banned and operational wastes, such as garbage and sewage, cannot simply be disposed of at sea, and are very strictly regulated.

Air pollution rules have also immensely cut sulphur oxide emissions from ships.

The latest efforts focus on driving the decarbonization of shipping supporting the global fight against climate change.

Of course, there is still more work to do.

As we mark 50 years of MARPOL, I invite all stakeholders to promote further dialogue on the next phase of IMO's work to enhance sustainable shipping and protect our planet and oceans.

Shipping is evolving. Shipping must embrace decarbonization, digitalization and innovative technology, including automation – while ensuring the human element is kept front and centre of the technological and green transition to ensure a sustainable planet for future generations.

MARPOL has made a difference to shipping – and to the health of our oceans – and will continue to do so, as we look ahead to the next 50 years.

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