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The IMO International Maritime Law Institute Official Electronic Newsletter (Vol. 7, Issue No. 46) 6 May 2010

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS OF MS. PELENI EMELINE TALAGI ON BEHALF OF THE CLASS OF 2009/2010 DURING THE 21ST ANNUAL GRADUATION CEREMONY

Ms. Peleni Emeline Talagi (Niue) delivered the valedictory address on behalf of the Class 2009/2010 during IMLI's 21st Graduation Ceremony held on 1 May 2010 at Malta Maritime Museum, in Vittoriosa.



Ms. Peleni Emeline Talagi (Niue), delivering the valedictory address on behalf of the Class 2009/2010

In her address, Ms. Talagi pointed out that:

“Our class is represented by countries as large as India, as developed as the United States of America through to smaller developing States such as St Kitts and Nevis. New countries also joined the IMLI family: Chile, the Dominican Republic, Eritrea and perhaps the smallest country to ever attend and the place where I am from; a tiny island in the South Pacific called Niue.

Our diversity is what made our experience at IMLI even more enriching in terms of understanding the legal frameworks and challenges faced by other countries. The comparative analysis of the common law and civil law jurisdictions has helped us understand and further appreciate how or why some decisions are reached and the history leading to these decisions helped us reach a common purpose.”

She continued by saying:

“Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, “If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.” IMLI has prepared us and provided the tools with which we can commence or continue our journeys, or our own maritime adventures when we return to our home ports. IMLI recognizes, as many of us from developing countries know too well, that short term consultants and advisors and technical assistance do not, in the long term, provide continuity, consistency or ownership of a good maritime law regime and it is this part of the IMLI curriculum that adds an even more practical dimension to our studies.”

Concluding, she addressed her colleagues by saying:

“To conclude, and if I may indulge, it was a pleasure meeting each and every one of you and I am proud to be part of the IMLI class of 2010. Nine months ago we met as strangers, and now we part as friends. I wish you all the very best in your future careers, aspirations and endeavours and look forward to following some of you in your careers and I am sure that some of us may meet each other across a conference table.

In the words of my native tongue, *kia monuina a mutolu oti he tau fenoga*; I wish you good blessings on your journeys home and thank you all for making the experience at IMLI and Malta a memorable one”

Hereunder follows the Valedictory Address by Ms. Peleni Emeline Talagi (Niue)

on behalf of the Class 2009/2010

At the 2010 IMLI Graduation Ceremony

1 May 2010

Your Excellency, IMO Secretary-General
Professor Attard,
Excellencies,
Fellow Graduands
Distinguished Guests

I stand before you today representing a diverse group of individuals, with different legal and cultural backgrounds and experiences, who converged on Malta nine months ago to embark on a common maritime adventure: IMLI. United by the ocean, our common goal was to enhance our knowledge about the common heritage of mankind and the laws and rules governing the oceans and maritime adventures.

The 21st IMLI Class boarded the IMLI ship and set sail with our navigators; Professor Attard at the helm and Mr. Martinez, Mr. Maceda and Miss Belja who steadfastly and patiently navigated us through the world of international maritime law - from safety at sea to the perils of the sea (such as piracy); from cleaner oceans to the realm of international law and diplomacy. As we sailed through internal waters, territorial seas, contiguous zones, the exclusive economic zones and the high seas, our vessel became heavier with the knowledge we gained and today, we have reached our final destination at IMLI.

The explorer Sir Francis Drake said that “there must be a beginning of any great matter, but the continuing unto the end until it be thoroughly finished yields the true glory,” and today at our final destination, with these words I am honoured to deliver this address on behalf of the IMLI Class of 2009/2010.

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It is this experience that sets IMLI apart from other maritime institutions; for it is this diversity that assists each and every one of us and is certainly most rewarding both professionally and personally. It enabled us to learn about each other's unique cultures and backgrounds and exchange experiences in the maritime sector which was also an exercise in diplomacy, as it is diplomacy that is exercised in the international fora in negotiating important instruments such as the Maritime Labour Convention which I note particularly as this is the IMO Year of the Seafarer.

The Year of the Seafarer was selected to give IMO and the international community the opportunity to "...pay tribute to the world's seafarers for their unique contribution to society and in recognition of their hardships and the risks they shoulder in the execution of their duties in an often hostile environment."

At the 102nd Session of the Council, His Excellency, the IMO Secretary-General said that *"the unique hazards confronting the 1.5 million seafarers of the world - including pirate attacks, unwarranted detention and abandonment - coupled with the predicted looming shortage of ships' officers, make it ever more incumbent to take immediate and effective action to forestall a situation from developing in which ships are not manned with sufficient skilled personnel"*.

Skilled personnel are essential to safer, secure and efficient shipping and cleaner oceans and the appropriate training of seafarers is a key to reach this goal. In this respect it is worth noting that to keep up to date with the shipping industry developments, a comprehensive review of the STCW Convention 1995 and its associated Code, is due to be undertaken at a Diplomatic Conference to be held in the Philippines in June this year.

The proposed amendments to the STCW Convention and Code will "...provide the necessary global standards for the training and certification of seafarers to man technologically advanced ships, today and for some time to come."

I trust that the international community considers and supports the proposed amendments to the STCW Convention and Code so that these ships are manned with appropriately skilled personnel. This will grant seafarers decent working conditions comparable to employees on land.

On this graduation today there is a mixture of feelings and emotions: a sense of accomplishment and achievement, joy and **relief**. For our families there is a sense of pride. It is said that with knowledge comes responsibility. We return to our homes fresh with knowledge and our role as advisors is to give the best advice possible.

An example, if I may use, is the South Pacific's recent tragedy involving the sinking of the passenger ferry the *Princess Ashika* in Tonga that resulted in the loss of 88 lives. Following a Commission of Inquiry the importance of seaworthiness and in particular correct and proper advice, was highlighted and it is with this that I say with knowledge comes responsibility.

With the knowledge we have gained over the past nine months, each and every one of us has a responsibility to ourselves, our employers and to the public at large to ensure that the IMO vision of safe, secure and efficient shipping and cleaner oceans, encapsulated in a variety of international negotiated and adopted legal treaties and instruments is promoted. Promoting and achieving internationally accepted practices and standards will help achieve uniformity and harmonisation and provide certainty among the maritime sector stakeholders.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." IMLI has prepared us and provided the tools with which we can commence or continue our journeys, or our own maritime adventures when we return to our home ports. IMLI recognizes, as many of us from developing countries know too well, that short term consultants and advisors and technical assistance do not, in the long term, provide continuity, consistency or ownership of a good maritime law regime and it is this part of the IMLI curriculum that adds an even more practical dimension to our studies.

Only a few weeks ago, the eruption of a volcano in Iceland resulted in the closure of the airspace for the United Kingdom and various northern European States. The volcanic eruption had a wide reaching impact on a global scale that grounded aircraft leaving thousands of passengers stranded worldwide and in some cases transport of these passengers is being made via cruise ships, ferries and even frigates. This highlights the importance of shipping and the respective roles that we will play.

We would like to thank the IMO, The Nippon Foundation, the EU funded SAFEMED project administered by REMPEC, Lloyd's Register Educational Trust, the Indian Ocean Commission, our respective Governments, shipping firms and private employers for providing us with the opportunity to study at IMLI and to enable us to be part of the IMLI global network.

We were also extremely fortunate and privileged to meet a vast network of experts from around the world to assist and guide us with their expertise in their respective fields. We would like to say thank you for as one colleague put it: their lectures were far more valuable and went beyond what textbooks can capture.

We were a most inquisitive class and we would like to thank the IMLI Resident faculty to whom we are especially grateful:

Professor Attard, thank you for your frankness and imparting to us your words of wisdom and experiences. We are grateful to have had an opportunity to catch a mere glimpse of your incredible career and insight, particularly in the international legal arena. We were always keen to listen to your stories about diplomacy in treaty negotiations and cases that had captured the world's attention and we were captivated, writing furiously during your classes to ensure that we did not miss a word.

Mr. Martinez, congratulations to you on your achievement today. We are honoured to be part of your day and you inspire and motivate us even more by reminding us that education is neverending and to always continue to achieve excellence. You always encouraged us to think further than we had and to be certain about our advice – always asking us, “are you sure?”. Thank you for your invaluable advice and words of encouragement.

Mr. Maceda, your experience as a seafarer and practical examples and patience in explaining the basics to us helped complete the overall picture of shipping and the maritime world. You certainly kept us on our toes whenever you asked us for an example, even if we looked to the ceiling or our books for inspiration.

Miss Belja, thank you for your dedication and enthusiasm in making maritime liens even more interesting – if that is at all possible! Thank you also for your encouragement and patience and keenness when assisting us. Please remember one thing: general average.

To the IMLI staff – we thank all of you for your kind assistance in helping our stay at IMLI and Malta as comfortable as possible and conducive to a study environment.

We would like to thank the government and people of Malta for their kind hospitality, and the Mediterranean mild climate and I think it is safe to say that when considering the diverse interests of the IMLI Class of 2010, all that Malta has to offer was experienced not just by one person but by the class as a whole. In fact we represented the world.

Finally, we would like to thank our loved ones at home, who await us at our home ports after nine months of study and sabbatical at IMLI. As our cheerleaders we are eternally grateful to them for we would not be here today without their love and support.

To conclude, and if I may indulge, it was a pleasure meeting each and every one of you and I am proud to be part of the IMLI class of 2010. Nine months ago we met as strangers, and now we part as friends. I wish you all the very best in your future careers, aspirations and endeavours and look forward to following some of you in your careers and I am sure that some of us may meet each other across a conference table.

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Thank you.

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