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IMLI^e-News

The IMO International Maritime Law Institute Official Electronic Newsletter (Vol. 8, Issue No. 2) 24 September 2010

IMO CELEBRATES WORLD MARITIME DAY 2010



The International Maritime Organization (IMO) celebrated on Thursday, 23 September 2010 World Maritime Day. World Maritime Day is the annual occasion when IMO leads the world in highlighting a key issue for the Organization and the shipping industry. This year the theme for World Maritime Day, is "**2010: Year of the Seafarer**"

IMLI is hereby reproducing for its IMLI e-news readers the message that the IMO Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Efthimios Mitropoulos prepared especially for this occasion.

WORLD MARITIME DAY 2010
2010: YEAR OF THE SEAFARER

**A message from the Secretary–General of the International Maritime Organization,
Mr. Efthimios E. Mitropoulos**

In today's global economy, hundreds of millions of people all over the world rely on ships to transport the great multitude of commodities, fuel, foodstuffs, goods and products on which we all depend. Yet, for most of them, shipping, not to mention the huge range of related maritime activities that, together, go to make up what is loosely termed "the shipping industry", does not register a particularly strong echo on their personal radar. The very nature of shipping makes it something of a "background" industry. For most people, most of the time, ships are simply "out of sight and out of mind".

And the same, as a consequence, can be said of the seafarers that operate the world's fleet, despite the fact that the global economy depends utterly on their presence. Seafarers are, in effect, the lubricant without which the engine of trade would simply grind to a halt.

It is, of course, sad when workforces are unrecognized and more or less taken for granted. When, for example, we switch on a light, we do not, generally, pause to think of all those who have laboured in the various sectors of the oil exploration and production process and, subsequently, in power generation and transmission industries to make it happen. Nor, when we sit at the table to eat our daily bread, do we pause to think of who brought the grain that enabled our local baker to bake it. Nor when, faced with a severe winter, do we pause to think of who carried, from its sources afar, the oil that heats our homes or fuels the energy on which we all so much depend these days. Well, perhaps we should; and we certainly should not use that as an excuse to continue to allow the seafarer, who helps these happen, to be ignored at best, and poorly treated at worst.

Seafaring is a difficult and demanding job, with its own set of unique pressures and risks. At the end of a long and stressful day, there is no return home to the family; no evening with friends at the taverna or the pub; no change of scenery; no chance to properly relax, unwind or de–stress. Just the relentless drone of the diesels and the never–ending movement of the vessel that is not only the seafarers' place of work but also their home, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for weeks and often for months on end; and, ever–present in the back of their mind, the possibility of natural and other, invidious hazards such as pirate attacks, unwarranted detention and abandonment in foreign ports.

In this, the Year of the Seafarer, our intention has been not only to draw attention to the unique circumstances within which seafarers spend their working lives, while rendering their

indispensable services, but also to make a palpable and beneficial difference. In selecting the "Year of the Seafarer" theme, our intention was also to use it as an excellent opportunity to reassure those, who labour at the "sharp end" of the industry – the seafarers themselves – that those of us who work in other areas of the maritime community, and yet whose actions have a direct bearing on seafarers' everyday lives, understand the extreme pressures they face and approach our tasks with genuine interest and concern for them and their families.

In this respect, the most significant achievement of the year undoubtedly came in June, with the adoption, by a Diplomatic Conference in Manila, of major revisions to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers – the STCW Convention – and its associated Code. Scheduled to enter into force on 1 January 2012, these revisions will ensure that the necessary global standards will be in place to train and certify seafarers to operate technologically advanced ships for some time to come.

The Manila Conference also agreed a series of new provisions on the issue of "fitness for duty – hours of rest", to provide watchkeepers aboard ships with sufficient rest periods. This important new provision will create better conditions for seafarers and help ensure they are adequately rested before they undertake their duties. Fatigue has been found to be a contributory factor to several accidents at sea and to ensure that seafarers are adequately rested before they take over their watch will certainly play an important role in safe sailing and the prevention of casualties. I am particularly pleased that the new STCW requirements on this crucial issue are consistent with the corresponding provisions of the International Labour Organization's 2006 Maritime Labour Convention, which I hope will come into force soon.

While the amendments to the STCW Convention and Code and the resolutions adopted by the Manila Conference can rightly be considered as the pinnacle of our regulatory efforts this year to create a better, safer and more secure world in which seafarers can operate, other efforts continue in parallel; because, at IMO, the human element and the interests of seafarers' work and life on board are always at the forefront of all our legislative work.

When IMO first mooted the idea that our theme for 2010 should focus on "the seafarer", we wanted to do two things; first, we wanted to draw attention to a workforce that is largely unheralded and unacknowledged, often even within the industry it serves: and, second, we wanted to extend the theme beyond the regular World Maritime Day celebrations and to galvanize a momentum that would last for the whole year and, indeed, beyond. We wanted 2010 to be the start of this momentum; but we certainly do not want the end of 2010 to be the end of the initiative.

To this end, I welcomed and embraced enthusiastically the decision of the Manila Conference that the unique contribution made by seafarers from all over the world to international seaborne trade, the world economy and civil society as a whole, should, from now on, be marked annually with a "Day of the Seafarer", to be held on 25 June of each year. The date chosen was that on which the Conference was concluded and acknowledges the significance of the STCW amendments then adopted for the maritime community and those who serve it on board ships. And I would warmly encourage Governments, shipping organizations, companies, owners, operators, managers and all other parties concerned to promote the Day of the Seafarer.

Earlier in the year, I identified three targets that I would be happy to see achieved in conjunction with our "Year of the Seafarer" initiative. They were:

- one, increased awareness among the general public of the indispensable services seafarers render to civil society at large;
- two, a clear message to seafarers that we recognize and appreciate their services; that we do care about them; and that we do all that we can to look after and protect them when the circumstances of their life at sea so warrant; and
- three, redoubled efforts at the regulatory level to move from words to deeds to create a better world in which seafarers can offer their services.

I think I can safely say that, so far, good progress has been made towards achieving all three of the set objectives. It is, therefore, very pleasing to see that the theme, which was selected in order to act as the focal point around which the maritime community as a whole would rally to seek ways to recognize and pay tribute to seafarers for their unique contribution to society and the vital part they play in the facilitation of global trade, has achieved, and is achieving, its aim. This has undoubtedly been happening and there have been numerous manifestations of this from all over the world.

The "Year of the Seafarer" has also helped to re-focus attention on the pressing need to come to grips with the long-predicted labour-supply shortage in the shipping industry – an issue that makes it imperative for shipping to re-launch itself as a career of choice for the high-calibre, high-quality young people of today. In this context, the "Year of the Seafarer" has added valuable impetus to the "Go to Sea!" campaign, which we launched at IMO in November 2008, in association with ILO, the "Round Table" of shipping industry associations and the International Transport Workers' Federation.

I should like to conclude by using the opportunity of this World Maritime Day message in order to communicate with a few segments of the community – especially those within and in the periphery of the shipping industry. This is what I would like to tell them:

– to members of the shipping industry: maintain high standards; enshrine best practices; embrace corporate social responsibility; provide a clean, safe and comforting workplace; recognize and reward those on whose labours your profits depend;

– to politicians: work towards the ratification, entry into force and implementation of all the international measures that have a bearing on seafarers' safety and security and living and working conditions; show that you really are in touch with the people at the sharp end;

– to legislators and law enforcers: aim at striking a fair balance in all of your actions concerning seafarers so that they do not become scapegoats caught up in the aftermath of accidents and incidents; treat them fairly and decently – they deserve every empathy and compassion;

– to educators: tell the younger generations about seafaring, the debt we owe to shipping and the attractions of the maritime professions; it should not take too great a leap of the imagination to stir maritime ingredients into the pot of learning through history, geography, biology, environmental studies, economics, business studies and many more;

– to port and immigration authorities: treat seafarers with the respect they deserve; welcome them as visitors and guests to your countries –as professionals that are also serving the interests and development of your nations and fellow citizens;

– to those in a position to shape and influence public opinion, particularly newspaper and TV journalists: take the time and trouble to seek out both sides of the story next time you report on an accident involving a ship; place the accident in its proper context, that of millions upon millions of tonnes of cargo safely delivered over billions of miles to all four corners of the earth by a talented, highly trained, highly specialized and highly dedicated workforce;

– and, finally, to the 1.5 million seafarers of the world, I should like to convey this message: the entire maritime community appreciates you and your indispensable services; is aware of the conditions under which you operate; shows compassion for the sacrifices you make; does care for you; and works to ensure your safety and security, praying that you always have calm seas, fair winds and a safe return home – which it wishes you wholeheartedly.

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