

IMLI *e*-NEWS

THE IMO INTERNATIONAL MARITIME LAW INSTITUTE OFFICIAL ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER

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IMLI'S 37TH GRADUATION CEREMONY



The IMO International Maritime Law Institute held its 37th Graduation Ceremony on Friday, 19 June 2026. The Ceremony marked the successful completion of an intensive year of studies in all areas of international maritime law, including law of the sea, shipping law, marine environmental law and ocean governance, maritime safety and security law, and maritime legislation drafting.

IMLI's simulcast Graduation Ceremony, which can be viewed [here](#), was presided over by Mr. Arsenio Domínguez (IMO Secretary-General; Chairman of the IMLI Governing Board) and attended by many dignitaries, including the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs of Malta, members of the IMLI Governing Board,

representatives of IMLI's esteemed donors, the President of the Comité Maritime International, the President of World Maritime University, the Commander of the Armed Forces of Malta, a delegation from the Italian Coast Guard, senior officials within the Government of Malta, and members of the Diplomatic Corps. IMLI past Graduates, former IMLI members of Staff, family members and friends were also in attendance to share in this joyous occasion with the graduands.

During the Ceremony, 64 students from 34 countries graduated from the Institute's various programmes. Forty students were awarded the Degree of Master of Laws (LL.M.) in International Maritime Law, 15 students were awarded the Degree of Master of Humanities (M.Hum.) in International Maritime Legislation, 4 students were awarded the Magister Juris (M.Jur.) Degree in International Maritime Law, 1 student was awarded the Doctor of Philosophy in International Maritime Law, and 4 students were awarded an Advanced Diploma in International Maritime Law. The 2026 Graduates now form part of an elite network of international maritime law specialists, who have also received sterling training at IMLI.

During the Ceremony, Professor Dr. Norman Martínez Gutiérrez (IMLI Director) delivered the Welcoming Address. The IMO Secretary-General, who was presiding over the ceremony, then delivered the Graduation Address. The Valedictory Address on behalf of the IMLI Class of 2025-2026 was delivered by Ms. Adi Salaseini Muavesi Lesianawai (Fiji).

In his Welcoming Address, Professor Dr. Martínez Gutiérrez welcomed the distinguished guests to IMLI's 37th Graduation Ceremony. He expressed deep appreciation for the continued support the Institute receives by the IMO Secretary-General, members of the IMLI Governing Board, donors, and the Government of Malta emphasizing that their commitment has been instrumental in advancing the Institute's mission of promoting the rule of international maritime law through education and capacity-building.

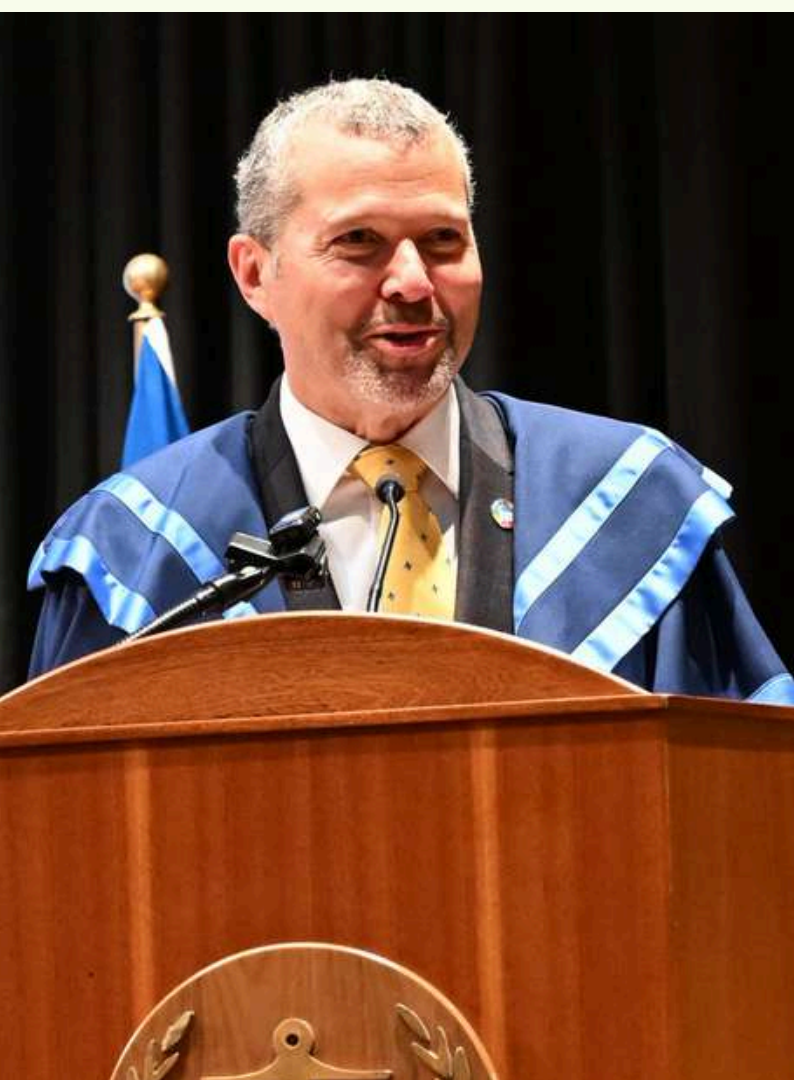
Reflecting on the Class of 2026, the Director praised the graduates for their dedication, resilience, and academic achievements. He noted that beyond acquiring legal expertise, they have developed qualities of integrity, compassion, and leadership that would enable them to become future leaders in the maritime sector. He also highlighted IMLI's unique role as a global centre of excellence, preparing professionals to strengthen the implementation of international maritime law in their respective countries.



Professor Dr. Norman Martínez Gutiérrez (IMLI Director) delivering the Welcoming Address

The Director recorded IMLI's expanding contribution to the IMO's Integrated Technical Cooperation Programme through the development of national maritime legal expertise, with particular emphasis on supporting Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries. He also reaffirmed the Institute's commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of young maritime professionals, noting that these efforts have strengthened IMLI's global outreach and have led to a steady increase in government nominations. Expressing appreciation to the IMO, the Government of Malta, donor governments, international organizations, foundations, visiting fellows, resident faculty, management, and staff, he emphasized that IMLI's achievements are the result of collective dedication to its mission.

In addressing the Class of 2026, the Director reminded them that their education marked the beginning of a lifelong responsibility to advance effective maritime legal frameworks, strengthen maritime governance, protect the marine environment, and safeguard seafarers' rights. Using the story of a lighthouse keeper as a metaphor, he encouraged them to remain steadfast in upholding the rule of international maritime law, even when the impact of their work is not immediately visible. He concluded by congratulating the graduands and urging them to serve as proud ambassadors of IMLI while making lasting contributions to the global maritime community.



Mr. Arsenio Domínguez (IMO Secretary-General; Chairman, IMLI Governing Board) delivering the Graduation Address

In his Graduation Address, Mr. Domínguez congratulated the Institute's 64 graduates, highlighting the significance of this year's cohort, which reflects continued growth in student enrolment, increased female participation, and greater representation from Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries. He praised the Institute's sustained commitment to excellence and acknowledged its important contribution to supporting the work and objectives of the International Maritime Organization.

Since the 40th Session of the IMLI Governing Board was held in the morning, the Secretary-General noted that holding the Board meeting on the same day as the graduation ceremony has enabled Board members to witness firsthand the impact of their guidance and support. He encouraged graduates to engage with Board members, sponsors, and partners, emphasizing the

value of building professional networks and sharing constructive feedback to help the Institute continue improving. He expressed his appreciation to Director Martínez Gutiérrez, the faculty, and staff for their dedication to the work of the Institute. He also thanked the governments and organizations whose continued financial support enables the Institute to fulfil its mission.

Turning to the graduands, the Secretary-General reminded them of their vital role in upholding international maritime law and strengthening the implementation of IMO instruments. Against the backdrop of an increasingly complex global maritime environment, he stressed the importance of translating international obligations into effective national legislation and called on graduates to contribute, through their expertise and practical experience, to improving the global regulatory framework. He underlined that their work would help ensure that shipping remain one of the safest, most sustainable, and efficient modes of transport.

In concluding his Address, the Secretary-General encouraged the graduands to remain curious, uphold the highest standards of integrity and professionalism, and pursue continuous personal and professional development. He urged them to stay connected with the Institute, continue sharing their ideas and experiences, and support one another throughout their careers. Expressing pride in their achievements and confidence in their future contributions, he congratulated the graduands once again and wished them every success as they embark on the next stage of their professional journeys.

The Address of the Secretary-General was followed by the Valedictory Address on behalf of the IMLI Class of 2025-2026, delivered by Ms. Lesianawai from Fiji. Her Address reflected on the graduates' transformative academic journey and expressed gratitude to all those who supported them along the way.

She noted that while the students represented diverse nations, legal systems and cultures, they had been united by a common purpose: to strengthen their knowledge and return home better equipped to serve their countries and the international maritime community. Drawing on the Fijian expression "*Noqu Kalou. Noqu Vanua.*" ("My God. My Country."), she emphasized the values of faith, service and dedication that had guided the class throughout their studies.



Ms. Adi Salaseini Muavesi Lesianawai (Fiji) delivering the Valedictory Address on behalf of the IMLI Class of 2025-2026

Ms. Lesianawai highlighted IMLI's enduring contribution to advancing the objectives of the IMO by building global capacity in international maritime law. She paid tribute to the Government and people of Malta, Judge Professor David Attard, Director Martínez Gutiérrez, the Institute's faculty and staff, and the governments, institutions and donors whose vision and support have enabled maritime professionals from around the world to benefit from IMLI's programmes. She described the Institute as a global centre of excellence that strengthens international cooperation and the implementation of maritime law.

Reflecting on the graduating class, Ms. Lesianawai celebrated its strong representation of women and echoed the IMO's theme, "*From Policy to Practice: Advancing Gender Equality for Maritime Excellence*," encouraging her classmates to champion meaningful progress for women throughout the maritime sector. She recalled the challenges, demanding workload and shared experiences that had fostered resilience, friendship and professional growth, reminding her fellow graduands that the graduation is marking not the end of their journey but the beginning of a greater responsibility to apply their knowledge in service of their countries and the international community.

Concluding her address, Ms. Lesianawai urged her colleagues to return home with a renewed sense of purpose: to uphold the rule of international law, promote maritime safety, protect the marine environment and contribute to peaceful international cooperation. She encouraged the Class of 2025–2026 to carry forward IMLI's legacy of excellence with wisdom, integrity and courage, describing the sea as a bridge that connects people, cultures and nations. She closed by expressing her hope that IMLI would continue to shine as a beacon of scholarship and international cooperation for future generations of maritime leaders.

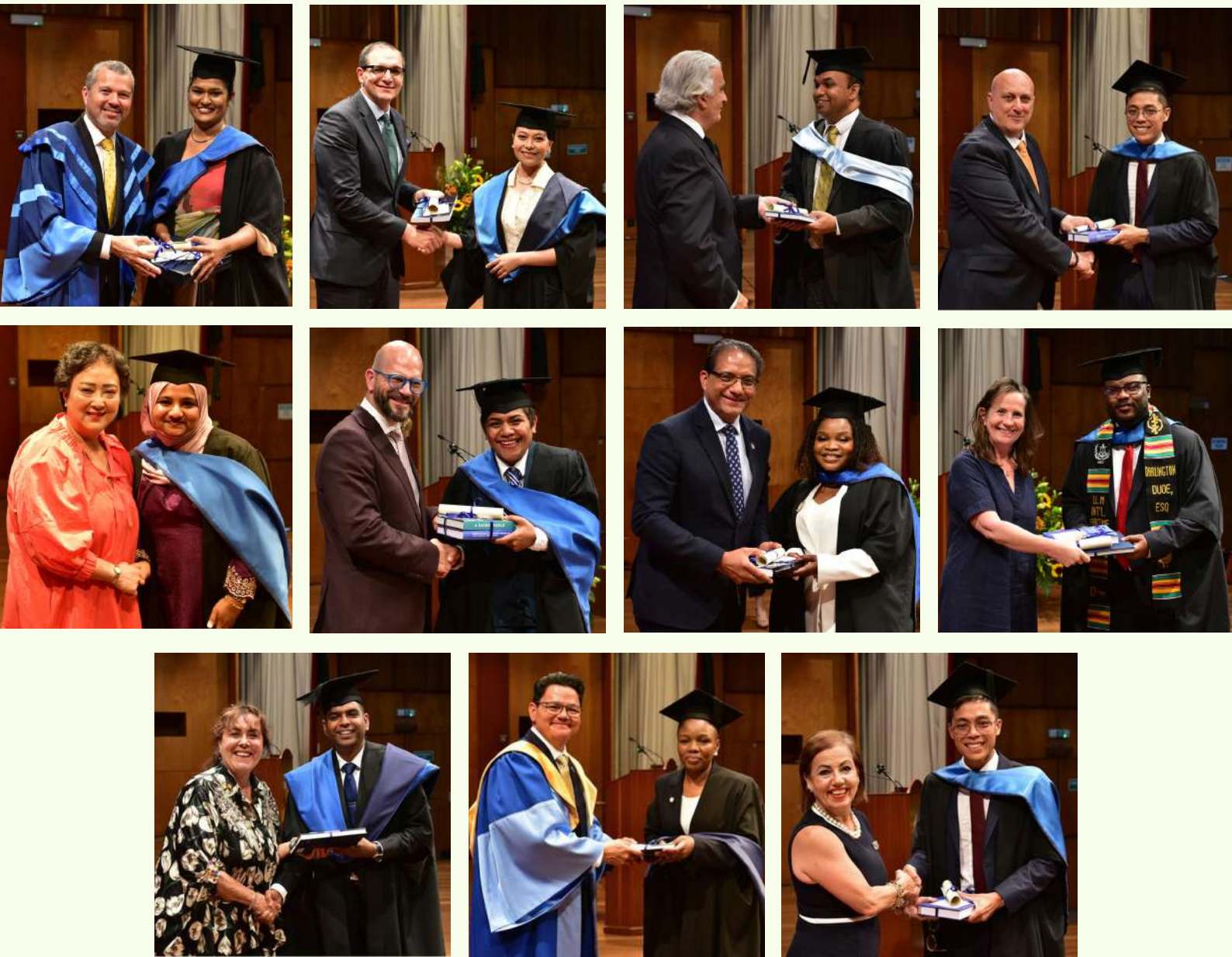


IMLI Class of 2025-2026 taking the Graduation Oath to the IMO International Maritime Law Institute

The Addresses were followed by the conferment of degrees, concluding with the award of prizes for outstanding performances in various categories as listed below.

The ringing of the ceremonial bell signified the official conclusion of the Graduation Ceremony and of IMLI's 37th Academic Year.

PRIZES AWARDED DURING IMLI'S 37TH GRADUATION CEREMONY



The Recipients of the Prizes awarded during IMLI's 37th Graduation Ceremony are (from L-R):

IMO Secretary-General's Prize for Best Dissertation:

Dr. Ganepola Achchige Vishni Lakna Ganepola (Sri Lanka)

Government of Malta Prize for the Best Maritime Legislation Drafting Project:

Atty. Princess Cue Aragon-Gebilaguin (the Philippines)

Professor David Attard Prize for Best Performance in the Law of the Sea:

Judge Aravinda Gihan Gunaratne Kapugama Vithanage (Sri Lanka)

Transport Malta Prize for Best Performance in Shipping Law:

LCDR Carlo Nico B. Aguilana (the Philippines)

Sasakawa Prize for the Best Performing Nippon Foundation Scholar:

Ms. Aishath Zahaa (Maldives)

LRF Prize for the Best Performing Lloyd's Register Foundation Scholar :

Ms. Adi Salaseini Muavesi Lesianawai (Fiji)

Dr. Kofi Mbiah's Prize for the Best Performing African Scholar:

Ms. Nuru Pipino (Tanzania)

ITF Seafarers' Trust Prize on Seafarers' Law:

Atty. D. Darlington Duoe (Liberia)

Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (Malta Branch) Prize for Best Performance in Maritime Transport Law:

Deputy Commandant Rajat Mathuria (India)

REMPEC Marine Environment Law Prize:

Ms. Pudensiana Patrice Mrema (Tanzania)

CMI Prize for Best Overall Performance:

LCDR Carlo Nico B. Aguilana (the Philippines)

