

INTERNATIONAL CHAMBER OF SHIPPING (ICS)

INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION (ITF)

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MESSAGE TO G20 LEADERS AND MINISTERS ON FACILITATING ESSENTIAL MOVEMENT OF SEAFARERS AND MARINE PERSONNEL

About 90 per cent of global trade is moved by maritime transport, which is the lifeblood of the global economy, and is dependent on the world's 2 million seafarers and marine personnel who operate the world's merchant ships.

Given the expected continuation of travel and flight restrictions, there is a critical need for Governments to address the serious problem of facilitating ships' crew changes. Without co-ordinated global action, the efficient flow of imports and exports carried by sea will be jeopardised, with negative impacts on the resilience of national economies throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

While it is right for Governments to focus on the immediate public health emergency presented by COVID-19, we must not forget that – amongst other economically important activities – that merchant ships move the world's medical supplies, food, energy and raw materials, plus the manufactured products and components which, due to complex global supply chains, are necessary for national economies to function effectively and for the preservation of jobs.

On 30 March 2020, the G20 trade and investment ministers declared: “*We will ensure smooth and continued operation of the logistics networks that serve as the backbone of global supply chains. We will explore ways for logistics networks via air, sea and land freight to remain open, as well as ways to facilitate essential movement of health personnel and businesspeople across borders, without undermining the efforts to prevent the spread of the virus.*”

Critical to delivering on this G20 statement will be for Governments to ensure the continuing functioning of the global maritime transportation system by facilitating the essential movement of the world's seafarers and marine personnel, including the ability to conduct crew changes.

As the COVID 19 pandemic continues, we wish to draw the attention of G20 leaders and ministers to the recommended measures for Governments to facilitate crew

changes in ports, circulated by the UN International Maritime Organization (IMO) as Circular Letter 4204/Add 6, dated 27 March 2020.¹

These comprehensive recommendations include designating professional seafarers and marine personnel, regardless of nationality, as "key workers" providing an essential service and granting them appropriate exemptions from national travel or movement restrictions, to enable them to join and leave ships. These recommendations are fully in line with the guidance provided to Governments by the World Health Organization, and complemented by the tripartite statement issued by the International Labour Organization on 31 March.²

We urge G20 leaders and ministers to do everything possible to ensure that these recommendations to Governments are fully implemented.

In addition to the many travel restrictions, plus challenges related to immigration and health screening protocols affecting seafarers and marine personnel, a pressing obstacle to crew changes – which are critical for safe and efficient maritime transportation activities to continue – is the current suspension of flights from many of the world's airports.

For humanitarian reasons – and the need to comply with international safety and employment regulations – crew changes cannot be postponed indefinitely.

Every month (in normal circumstances) around 100,000 seafarers need to be changed over from the ships which they operate, in order to comply with relevant international maritime regulations to protect health, safety and welfare and ensure, amongst other activities, the safe transportation by sea of vital goods and products.

The global maritime transport industry recognises that the restrictions and health protocols which currently apply in many States with regard to air travel, the movement of ships' crews and their embarkation and disembarkation in ports, means that many crew changes may need to be postponed at least until May 2020, and potentially for somewhat longer.

However, tens of thousands of seafarers, whose tours of duty have to come to end, are already waiting to be repatriated, and we could soon reach a point when flag State Administrations may no longer be willing to grant extensions for seafarers to stay on board their ships.

¹

<http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Documents/Circular%20Letter%20No.4204Add.6%20%20Coronavirus%20Covid-19%20Preliminary%20List%20Of%20Recommendations.pdf>

² https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/maritime-labour-convention/special-tripartite-committee/WCMS_740130/lang--en/index.htm

It is also a great concern for the industry that the restrictions in place have resulted in thousands of seafarers being at sea for several months already and this, combined with demanding tasks, both physical and mental, increases exponentially the risk of marine accidents and disasters happening, which is a daunting scenario for an already fragile and stretched global economy.

A global strategy is therefore required to deliver the necessary co-operation among relevant UN specialized agencies, Governments and other relevant stakeholders, including major airlines, to facilitate the movement and changeover of ships' crews as soon as practicable.

As an immediate step, we call on all Governments to identify ports in their countries, and appropriate airports nearby, from where crew changes can be resumed as soon as possible, and to inform IMO and the International Civil Aviation Organization accordingly.

We also call on Governments, in the event of medical emergencies, to provide visiting seafarers with access to emergency medical treatment ashore and, if necessary, to facilitate emergency repatriation as required by the ILO Maritime Labour Convention, 2006.

We also request, as a matter of urgency, that national authorities should engage immediately with their national shipowners' association, seafarers' unions and other relevant stakeholders, in order to explore solutions to the serious problem of conducting crew changes, which otherwise risks impeding collective efforts to address the COVID-19 pandemic whilst also allowing global supply chains to continue to function.

We further suggest that the establishment of a special G20 taskforce on the issue of ships' crew changes would add greatly to an effective response to the coronavirus pandemic.

We appreciate that this is a challenging time for Governments, and welcome the lead already given by the G20 in recognising the importance of maritime transportation. We stand ready to work with the G20 to ensure that global supply chains can continue to function, and that a solution can be found to the complex challenge of facilitating crew changes for ships trading worldwide.



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