



29 Sept 2011

Help for piracy victims launches today

A programme to help seafarers and families cope with the physical and mental trauma caused by torture and abuse at the hands of pirates launches today in London, England.

Pirates are routinely using extreme brutality and the threat of death against seafarers and their relatives. The new Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme (MPHRP) is intended to help those seafarers and their families cope with the resulting pain and anguish.

Funded by the ITF (International Transport Workers' Federation) Seafarers' Trust charity and The TK Foundation, and chaired by Peter Swift, formerly MD of industry body INTERTANKO, the new programme speaks for an alliance of shipowners, trade unions, managers, manning agents, insurers and welfare associations representing the entire shipping industry, from crews to owners.

Its mission is to aid seafarers who have been or may be subject to pirate attack. Somali-based pirates now regularly treat hostage seafarers with extreme violence in order to put pressure on their families and/or employers to expedite their ransom demands. This includes phoning family members and making the seafarer plead for his life while he is abused and threatened with death, and filming this and posting it online for relatives to see.

Peter Swift, MPHRP chair, explained: "Piracy is reaching an all-time high: in the number of incidents, in the vast ransoms demanded and, most of all, in the extreme violence used. The treatment meted out to the victims now frequently crosses the line from savagery into torture."

"The effects are potentially horrendous," he continued. "For those, say, who successfully resisted capture but were nearly burnt alive in the room in which they barricaded themselves; for the brutalised hostages; and for those who daily put to sea in fear that it may at any time happen to them. And that's not to forget the families, who are now firmly on the pirates' target list."

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Roy Paul, of the ITF Seafarers' Trust, and MPHRP programme manager, added: "Until now, there has been little coordinated help for those who are suffering. Now that will change. With the help of those in the industry who want to do their best for those involved, we intend to build up a network of first responders and get psychosocial help for affected crews."

He concluded: "We have already been listening to seafarers and recording their experiences. Those will lay the foundation for new guides for seafarers, families and employers, for training in their use, and for building the networks of human and medical help that are now desperately needed."

Peter Swift and Roy Paul will be speaking at the event alongside Dr Marion Gibson, psychosocial consultant to the MPHRP (their speeches appear in full below, along with testimonies of those affected by piracy). Other guests include: Second Engineer Chirag Bahri, who was held hostage by pirates for eight months and was subjected to torture; Bishop Kalathiparambil, secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People; Rear Admiral Ort, chief of staff of NATO's HQ in Northwood; Capt Andy Winbow, assistant secretary general, IMO; leaders of international shipping organisations and other programme partners*.

The MPHRP partner organisations** are: BIMCO, ICMA, ICSW, IFSMA, IGP&I, IMB, IMEC, IMHA, Intercargo, InterManager, INTERTANKO, IPTA, ISAN, ISF, ITF, IUMI, OCIMF and SIGTTO.

The MPHRP observers are the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the NATO Shipping Centre.

The MPHRP funders are the ITF Seafarers' Trust and The TK Foundation.

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You will be sent photos of the launch event later today.

*Full guest list below

**Organisation names in full appear below

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Piracy intro

Piracy is costing billions of dollars, endangering people and trade, and ruining lives. Right now there are up to 300 innocent seafarers being held hostage by Somali pirates, who are increasingly turning to torture and the threat of death to speed up ransom payments and force kidnapped crews to steer their ships so they can be used as the motherships that have extended the pirates' operations thousands of miles from Somalia.

Piracy has never been so far reaching, so savage or so successful. According to monitoring body the IMB (International Maritime Bureau) piracy at sea hit an all-time high in the first three months of 2011. www.icc-ccs.org/news/441-attacks-off-the-somali-coast-drive-piracy-to-record-high-reports-imb. See also: www.icc-ccs.org/news/450-pirate-attacks-at-sea-getting-bigger-and-bolder-says-imb-report

The IMB has told the MPHRP that as of 25th September 2011 there are currently 15 vessels with 277 crew under negotiations (hostage), and a further 19 being held prisoner on land.

Worldwide figures as of 25th September, courtesy of IMB:

Type attack	Total
Attempted	94
Boarded	134
Hijacked	35
Fired Upon	81
Grand Total	344

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Country	type attack	Total
Gulf of Aden	Attempted	13
	Boarded	1
	Hijacked	4
	Fired Upon	14
Gulf of Aden Total		32
Red Sea	Attempted	21
	Boarded	3
	Fired Upon	9
Red Sea Total		33
Somalia	Attempted	38
	Boarded	14
	Hijacked	20
	Fired Upon	55
Somalia Total		127
Grand Total		192

The results are not just economic, they also affect those currently held, those who have been held and released, and everyone sailing in the vast affected areas – as well as their families. To try and counter that psychological damage, the MPHRP was formed. See www.mphrp.org for more details.

Over the last eight years it is believed that some 4000 seafarers have been attacked by pirates or been victims of armed robbers while at work onboard. Multiply this by the number of family members involved, add the number of seafarers and their families living in fear of attack and you see why we believe the programme is needed.

Speeches

Speech to be delivered by Dr Peter M Swift, MPHRP chair

Piracy and armed robbery is one of the foremost threats facing the international shipping community today; be it off Somalia, in the Western Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Guinea, the South China Sea or elsewhere.

The annual economic cost of piracy was estimated at USD 12 billion last year; however the human cost is incalculable.

Nearly four thousand seafarers have been taken hostage during hijackings in the past five years and detained for months in appalling conditions while being subjected to physical and mental abuse. Tens of thousands of others have been the victims of a pirate attack. Today nearly 300 seafarers are being held hostage on ships off the Somali coast with another 20 held ashore; the longest now having been held for 18 months – all of them under increasingly violent conditions. And every single day of the year more than one hundred thousand seafarers experience anxiety and fear while sailing in, or towards, piracy infested waters while their families share these worries, frequently with a feeling of helplessness.

Despite numerous diplomatic, military and other initiatives by many governments and governmental agencies, particularly in the Indian Ocean, and the protective measures and other actions adopted by shipowners, ship-managers and their representatives, ships are still regularly attacked and seafarers put at risk as they go about their legitimate business in international waters.

While acknowledging the actions of governments, the United Nations (UN) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the shipping industry has recognised that more needs to be done to support seafarers and their families. Seafarers naturally play a pivotal role in any piracy incident and the appropriate preparations are integral to their well-being, as well as ultimately also to that of their families, and to the overall outcome of the incident. Similarly there is a need to ensure that the appropriate support is available to them and their families during and post any incident.

In the same way that some companies have implemented the industry's Best Management Practices; guidance for ships to avoid, delay and deter piracy attacks, some have also adopted sound practices to address the humanitarian needs of the crew and their family members during the three phases of an incident from pre-departure, during and after. Regrettably many have not.

Recognising the above, partner organisations representing shipowners, ship-managers, manning agents, trade unions, insurers, welfare associations and others, together with intergovernmental organisations, joined together to establish a unique programme to support seafarers and their families worldwide – the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme (MPHRP).

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The programme has been built around:

- a task group of multi-disciplined, international experts,
- extensive fact finding and the feedback gained from meetings and interviews with seafarers and families worldwide, including many with first hand experience of attacks and hijackings,
- advisory groups on industry practices and procedures, pre-deployment piracy training, incident management and the skills required of responders, and
- the advice and assistance of a project steering group.

The Humanitarian Response Programme has chosen this day (29 September 2011) to launch our programme since today the IMO, in London, will celebrate World Maritime Day 2011. The theme for this year's World Maritime Day is 'Piracy: orchestrating the response' and included in the IMO's action plan is the 'provision of care for those attacked or hijacked by pirates and for their families'. At the launch of the year's theme in February the UN Secretary General, Mr Ban Ki Moon, recognised the importance of this aim when he said: "Finally, let us never forget the detrimental impact of piracy on the innocent seafarers themselves – the men and women who face all manner of hardship in transporting the world's precious cargo. They are on the frontlines of this battle. Their welfare and safety must also be at the forefront of our concerns." The MPHRRP is squarely aimed at providing guidance to companies, welfare associations and others to support those seafarers in the frontline and their families.

Having conducted much fact finding in the field and having had the benefit of professional advisers and consultants, the programme in its first phase is developing:

- 'good practice' guides for use by shipping companies, manning agents and welfare associations to support both seafarers and seafarers' families through the three phases of a piracy incident from pre-departure, during the crisis, and post release/post incident,
- associated training modules,
- an international network of trained first responders with appropriate skills within partner and associated organisations,
- access to a network of professional aftercare,
- a 24 hour seafarers' international telephone helpline

The shared concern of all the partner associations for the well-being and welfare of seafarers and their families before, during and after a piracy or armed robbery attack underpins the work of the programme and the commitment of these organisations.

Our programme manager, Roy Paul, will (now) describe some of the experiences of seafarers held hostage. He will be followed by our lead consultant, Dr Marion Gibson, who will summarise the needs of seafarers and their family members which could arise as a result of an act of piracy and provide a few examples of good practices to help cope in such circumstances.

We thank you for your interest.

Speech to be delivered by Roy Paul, MPHRP manager

It seems most appropriate to hold this launch today here at the London Docklands Museum. As we have travelled around and spoken to people about what our programme is trying to do we hit the first problem. That is that when people consider pirates they have different pictures in their minds. Maybe Captain Hook in Peter Pan or, more likely, Johnny Depp as Captain Jack Sparrow.

Here at the museum they have a very good exhibition of the life of Captain Kidd. The person who helped create much of the stories and mythology that we have come to know and love. Captain Kidd didn't need to be a pirate. He was a rich man with rich backers but he turned to this way of life and his capture and trial and, eventually, execution just down the river from here at Wapping have shaped the way we see characters like Blackbeard, Long John Silver and even Jack Sparrow.

Most people still don't understand that the face of piracy today is very different to the romance of the Pirates of the Caribbean. Today seafarers are meeting pirates who are really sea terrorists: hard, desperate and violent criminals. In Somalia in the early days of piracy they told us that the Tsunami of 2004 took the toxic waste that the western world had dumped and put it onto their shores, poisoning their fish and destroying their livelihoods, and there was some sympathy about this. However from taking small fishing boats to hold for a small ransom to feed their people they very quickly moved into the low risk, high return business of taking ships and their crews hostage.

Having used a small group of pirates to attack and capture the vessel, they now have GPRS (General packet radio service) directors to make the ships' masters sail the vessel to the Somalia Coast. Here the capturing pirates are replaced by heavily armed guards who are there to ensure the seafarers stay put and also that other gangs of pirates don't come and steal their treasure. From the accounts we have collected from crews they are like animals – worse than animals – have disgusting toilet habits and use drugs all of the time. They slaughter their goats on the deck and leave the carcasses and blood stains to rot there. These guards know no English language and use violence to keep the crew in place if they do not obey their orders.

The crew have to seek permission to do everything: get drinks, stand up or go to the toilet. They are usually kept together on the bridge or in the captain's cabin under armed guard 24 hours a day. A negotiator will also be brought onto the vessel to negotiate on behalf of the pirates and act as interpreter to the crew. Later on the crew may be allowed to sleep four or five to a cabin.

There is concern now that seafarers are also being kept ashore, away from the vessels, and this is a worrying development. Once the ship's stores are gone then rice, pulses and goats are brought for the crew but in small supply. Sometime senior crewmembers are separated and locked in solitary cabins and the crew are told that they have been killed for not doing as they were told.

Seafarers have told us of punishments and torture that have been handed out which included seafarers being dangled into the sea, being stripped and left for hours in cold stores, being tied up in the sun for hours, being hit with rifle butts and sticks and also having their genitals tied with cable ties. These appear to be isolated occasions but they have taken place. Obviously being held under these conditions is torture in itself and there are increasing stories of mental torture, mock executions, and rifles being fired near seafarers while they are phoning their loved ones, and these are also very worrying.

As we spoke to seafarers it became very obvious that their main concern was about whether their families would cope, whether their wages would still be sent home. Occasionally the seafarers are allowed to telephone their families and these calls are usually used by the pirates to make threats to the seafarers' families about what will happen to their husbands if they don't make the company or government pay the ransom.

Negotiations for such large ransoms take time and are taking longer to reach a conclusion. When they do and the payment is dropped to the ship, then this too becomes a difficult time for the seafarers, as the pirates share out their loot and fight and shoot each other, and seafarers risk getting hit by ricochets and caught in the crossfire.

After that the crew are released and this is where we hope that our programme will really come into action. Seafarers that we have spoken to who have been released have shown that the level of care they receive is very varied. Some companies have put them into hotels, given them medical care, arranged a barber and hairdresser and new clothes and shoes and then arranged to fly them home, where they have assembled their loved ones to meet them. Sadly, others have been kept on the ship and then flown home in the clothes they have been wearing for the past five to eight months. On arriving home they are told do not talk to anyone and, being loyal, they don't share their experiences and concerns with anyone.

Evidence shows that if hostages are treated quickly and properly when they are released they recover more speedily, and are less likely to suffer problems. We have been fortunate during our programme to be able to use consultants of very high calibre from around the world who have experience of both trauma and the maritime world. Our main consultants, Dr Alastair Hull from Edinburgh, who sadly can't be here today, and Dr Marion Gibson, who I am happy to say is with us today, have played a very important part in advising us on our programme, and I would like to give the floor now to Dr Gibson. MF

Speech to be delivered by Dr Marion Gibson, psychosocial consultant to MPHRP

This launch today represents a milestone on the road to the implementation of the overall programme. To explain my role, and the role of my professional colleagues, I will explain the tasks which I was given.

My brief was to advise on the humanitarian needs of seafarers and their family members which could arise as a result of an act of piracy. Then design a programme which would meet these needs, which would be global, professionally sound and readily accessible. The more I got to work on this brief the more I realised what a vast task I had been set. My previous experience of providing training within the maritime industry for some 15 years was valid, as was my experience of being involved in a wide range of traumatic incidents, including acts of terrorism.

What do we mean by 'humanitarian needs' was the first question which had to be answered. We know from experience and research that there are practical and psychological needs experienced by the people involved in traumatic incidents. There has been little specific research into piracy incidents. As you know much is being done to 'harden' ships against attack so that there will be less physical damage to the vessels and to the cargo which they are transporting. This programme is about doing the same for the human beings involved. Due to the ripple effect of such incidents we have been asked to provide support not only to the seafarers and their family members. but to other people involved such as negotiators, company personnel, security guards, rescuers and first responders.

This programme have been very diligent in taking time to meet and talk to those seafarers and their family members who have experienced or, in the case of family members, are experiencing such circumstances. The programme also allowed me to facilitate a meeting of a task group of professionals to discuss and identify such needs from their experience in practice.

Visiting a variety of countries has meant that all plans we have produced are flexible enough to address cultural sensitivities. Those people we talked to told us of the practical and psychological impact on their lives.

We asked them such questions as:

- "What was the most helpful thing that happen and which helped you to cope?"
- "What was the worst thing that you had to cope with?"
- "What would have made it easier for you to cope?"

Based on their answers we have produced, in association with our programme partners, a set of good practice guides to address the needs. These guides are designed not only to enhance the good practice which already exists in companies but to alert others of the need to plan to make such provision now.

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Most of the seafarers recalled how difficult the first few days were when they were captured. The pirates were trying to exert their supremacy over the lives of their captives. Threat and actual physical violence was often part of this process. Their difficulties included dealing with the shock of the attack and the reality of the fact that they had actually been captured, uncertainty about how long they would be held, fear for their lives, and the conditions which they might have to endure. Overriding many of their comments was fear for their families and how they would cope with the news of their capture and during the period of their capture.

Several spoke of how the pirates had abused their phone calls to their family members; which they were forced to make (as they realised that such calls would add to the stress on the family)

The family members recalled that their primary need was naturally for their loved ones to come home safely as soon as possible. Some heard of the piracy act from the media. They recalled how little news they were given by some of the companies. In some cases, they had to initiate contact with the companies and they seemed to be talking to a different person each time they contacted to seek news. The prolonged stress of hearing no news was hard to cope with over the long months of negotiations. Fear of lack of financial support to maintain their family's needs was the main physical need. Psychologically they tried to cope with the aid of family support and support from faith and welfare organisations. Their mood often changed from hope to despair many times each week. Those with children found it difficult to explain the situation and to maintain normality in such circumstances.

Using these comments in the guide which has been produced for companies, manning agents etc, we recommend the appointment of a family liaison representative within the company to maintain regular contact with the family throughout the time of captivity and to help organise the homecoming. The guides also contain advice on how to handle the media contacts and possible contacts from pirates.

In our fact-finding interviews it became evident that humanitarian support was needed before, during and after such incidents. We recognise that seafarers and their families are a resilient group of people. We feel that training and information sharing pre-deployment could help to prepare for such incidents if they do occur. During an attack, pre-training in how to handle the psychological reactions which may be experienced in conditions of captivity could minimise some of the negative feelings for those involved. If companies and seafarers can give the families knowledge that a plan exists to support them 'in the unlikely situation of a piracy attack' this can help alleviate immediate fears of being 'forgotten' in the process.

At the time of release the feelings of elation may be mixed with feelings of apprehension about the impact which such an experience has had on the seafarer and their family members. Problems of re-integration may occur and, again, practical advice on how to manage the first weeks may avoid longer term problems developing.

We believe that this programme needs to function before, during and after such attacks. We believe that by improving understanding of the practical and psychological needs of those involved we can minimise the negative impact of such experiences. We see the programme as a continuum of care. At one end of the continuum is organised and informed support. Through to the provision of appropriate support post release. Within this continuum is the period of rehabilitation prior to their return to the sea. We believe that, given access to appropriate support, those involved will be better able to build up their own resilience to the natural stress reaction to the incident. For a small number of those involved there will be a need for professional assessment and planned treatment. Access to this resource is also part of this programme.

The Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme is not only a programme which reacts to an incident but it aims to prevent some of the negative results of such attacks through a health promotion approach involving pre-training and informed preparation prior to any attack happening. We will also conduct research into all the aspects of our work which will allow us to adapt the programme as it develops and inform those who will be involved in the future.

Seafarers' and families' testimonies (NB, as collected)

A captain

“After being attacked, we were taken hostage for 71 days by 12 hijackers. These were replaced by other hijackers every two weeks. We had to stay for all the time and sleep with 10 crew-members on the bridge and we were not allowed to go anywhere except for the toilet. I was threatened 7 times with a gun on my head. Many nights I couldn't sleep at all. As a captain I felt a lot of responsibility and I was very lonely.

“24 hours a day the pirates were using the satellite-telephone speaking with very loud voices. After 171 contacts with the negotiators, we lost all our confidence in people. We became very cynical and even lost our trust in the negotiators. The hijackers were constantly using drugs and they ruined our ship and there were goat-carcasses all over the ship. Can you imagine the smell?”

The captain was asked: “For a normal person it is impossible to imagine what kind of hell you went through.”

The captain answered: “Do not even try to imagine it!”

The wife of the captain

“During the hostage-period we were visited very regular by a crisis-worker sent by the company, but he did not inform me completely, because of the negotiations.

“I was disappointed by the lack of empathy of many people around me, even in my family. I went along very well with my children. My address was kept secret from the press but I heard that they were calling people with the same surname as me.”

The captain talks about his release

“After 71 days the money was delivered, the hijackers started to fight each other, but after a period they left the ship. I sailed my ship to Oman. The rest of the crew were still very stressed and afraid sailing to an unknown 'dot' on the radar.

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“The first response there was well organised, we could stay with the crew for two more nights together. Slowly we gained back our human dignity: New clothes, toilet articles, a good bedroom, a shower, contacts with home etc. and of course the necessary operational debriefs.”

His wife talks about his release

“The first period home was hectic. Meeting children, friends and family, which was very difficult. My man was numbed. We met a psychologist, but that contact did not work because this man did not understand seafaring life. Another one did: he treated my man for a long time. PTSD was diagnosed and now my man is considered fit for duty. In the last year we experienced a lot of tension in our relation.”

An Italian First Responder describes meeting a wife whose husband is held captive

“When I asked the first question "how many are in your family?" she answered "if you include my husband, we are 4". This answer suggests that in the mind of the lady, the husband was separated from his family not only physically, but also in the mental representation of the concept of family. Speaking of her husband, the woman used verbs in the present to describe aspects of family life, but verbs in the past when speaking of him in his current situation.”

An Italian wife tells how she heard of the attack

“A few days before the event I had a telephone conversation with my husband. He was afraid as the ship would cross a critical area and he was convinced that phenomenon of "piracy was being underestimated". When I was called by the recruitment agency and they told me my reactions to the bad news were agitation, crying and sleep disturbances. My son started a sort of frantic search for information, whereas my daughter placed herself in a condition of refusal to accept the reality. I had to see my doctor and he gave me some treatment.”

An Italian wife tells of telephone calls with her husband.

“The first telephone contact with my husband came a day after the event. At the beginning calls were frequent (every 5 /10 days). These calls partially reassured me and I thought that there would be a quick solution. I felt that the calls were always filtered by pirates, some of which understood Italian and lasted from 2 to 6 minutes. My husband told me that he was fine with food and water daily rations in enough amounts but he said that not all the crew members were together as some of them were taken to the woods.”

An Italian first responder tells of the support the wife received

“In the first few months solidarity and participation were very important and relevant. The mayor of her town collected signatures for supporting the family in the broadest sense of the term, the town organized several sit-in and a match of the local football team. These experiences were somewhat reassuring and avoided the isolation of her family. At present this interest is going down and the lady is in constant contact just with one family member of another kidnapped.

“There are no economic problems as the family continues to receive his husband salary.

“In the lady’s opinion at the beginning there was no specific media interest for the event and several newspapers did not want to publish the news of the kidnapping. Three/four months after the event the national interest to this piracy act did increase. The lady was invited to some television shows and gave several interviews for national newspapers. However, this has created disagreements with other families of abducted seafarers thinking that multiple information provided to the media can complicate the ongoing negotiations.”

An Italian wife talks about what is happening to her family

I haven’t heard from my husband now for 7 months. The last time we spoke he told me about the diminution of food and water availability and depletion of fuel for air conditioners. Death threats to the hostages have increased. I have lost all faith in the institutions and the government officers. There are no longer any contacts between pirates and the Foreign Ministry. This makes me very much concerned and even agitated. What is life without any news? My great concern is that last time we spoke my husband told me about the threats of decapitation. In this situation the mood of our entire family and friends is very low.

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An Indian third engineer talks of his experience

“We were hijacked for about 6 months. The pirates group was cooperative but sometimes they used to torture us. Engine room was unmanned and the crew cooperated to manage machineries. We were really lucky as we were having sufficient provisions that lasted for 4 months and then we relied on Pulses and rice as we took provisions from Fujairah.

“The Pirates had once opened fire in air to scare the Engine staff as they needed the Air Conditioning plant to get operational. They want the job to be carried out in a minute time which was not possible on many occasions. Some crew were even tied up for few minutes as a way of showering their anger on innocent seafarers.

“I appeal to International organisations to help in stopping of such uncivilised acts at earliest as we seafarers are made a scapegoat.

“am very happy to be with my family back home but they all had suffered a lot during my captivity as all families are not even sure that their kins will come back safely or not.”

An Indian wife tells her story

“My husband told me that the pirates are really dirty people, are unhygienic and used to take Gaath...a form of drug. He lost 14 Kgs of weight during the 6 months of captivity. They were treated inhumanly; mentally tortured my husband developed an eye problem which was not treated until he returned home.

“I have a small baby child so it was very difficult for me to travel to different organisations in India. My Father in law had met DG Shipping and unions. We went through hell and that’s what all families went through during such periods. I appeal to all International Organisations to stop Piracy and save seafarers and their families from undergoing such menace.

“My husband is back and has now returned to sea but still many Indian and other seafarers are still in captivity of pirates and I hope and pray for all to come back home safely.

“Please do something to end this...this is totally not acceptable.”

An Indian second engineer tells of his period as a hostage and the torture that took place

“We were attacked by Somalian pirates firing RPG’s and AK-47. The crew were kept on bridge in the initial days and movements were restricted and we were not allowed to communicate with our families. The engine room was manned 24 hours and we were doing 12 on/off to run the machineries. All jobs ordered by the pirates were to be completed at their command and usually within a few minutes duration and this often risked the safety of our lives. They were emotionless and insensitive towards the crew, are unhygienic and are jaded with ailments such as STD and asthma.

“The situation on board worsened after 4 months of failed negotiations. The vessel was running out of fuel and so we were asked to run machineries with cargo of Benzene and castor oil, which is not at all possible and could lead to explosions and when we tried to explain this physical and mental tortured started on us.

“They suspected us of hiding a satellite phone in Engine room and I with my fellow crew member were tied up for 3-4 hours with cable ties and nylon rope on the bridge wing and were physically tortured and were battered. They came and tied our Genitals with plastic cable ties as a punishment. We thought our end has come and when we screamed they pulled them tighter.

“The Chief Engineer and Master suffered most as they were tied up naked in MEAT ROOM at -18C for 40 minutes. They even fired a bullet close to ears of Chief engineer. It was disheartening to see our superiors brutalized and converted into slaves of pirates. The crew were losing hope and dreamt of death every evening. To add to the tyranny, one of the fellow crew members stabbed us in our back by sharing relevant information like financial condition of company, the latitude/ longitude of other merchant vessels transiting through Indian Ocean, with pirates to gain their confidence. He also plotted against Captain and other fellow crewmembers by using our captivity as a mode to avenge his grudges.

“We are thankful to ALMIGHTY that we were able to produce Fresh water for 8 months and distributed water to other sailors on hijacked vessels too. I want to make seafarers aware that piracy is not a thriller movie but a dark comedy, dark for captives and comedy for pirates.

“We were very relieved to have come back home safely . My post hijack medical treatment was started upon arrival and am much better now. I would like to sail on high seas again free of piracy. “

An Indian father tells his story

“When we heard the news of our son’s vessel being hijacked, we were totally broken up and did not understand whom to approach. The company initially was very optimistic of bringing back our son from hands of pirates at earliest. It took 8 long awaited months for them to negotiate with monsters. We ran from pillar to post, all related Government agencies and unions were contacted and appealed to help us. But nothing worked out. It all ended when the company agreed to pay huge ransom amount to pirates.

“When my son returned home my first task was to tell him that we had lost his Mother during his captivity as she could not bear the thought of losing his son due to hijack and she had died.

“I Pray to God that this menace be brought to an end at earliest as family members suffers the most during the whole captivity period. At every meal we used to worry whether our Son is able to take food, what kind of atmosphere he is facing up to, we had horrific dreams at night. This episode has totally shattered our life.

“I am very happy and much relieved to see my Son back home after a dreadful period of incident and Pray that such crimes should not be allowed to sustain in our civilised world.”

A Ukrainian second officer describes an attack.

“It was on my shift and I kept watch on a bridge. We moved strictly in recommended zone and suddenly we saw Pirate’s boats which followed us. So, we started to tack. Our normal cruising speed was about 13-14 nautical miles but as far as you understand once we started maneuvering we reduced our speed down to 5-6 miles and pirates ran us down. Later I saw article in newspaper which alleged that Pirates climbed on board using hooks but it was not the case as we had 21 m board height and it’s practically impossible to throw a line from the water level while moving to such height. We were forced to stop the vessel and let them on board after they fired a burst to the bridge.

“As this happened it was rather unusual feeling like in my sleep and then I thought: "Here they come" like I saw customs or immigration officials going on board. At the same time I saw a strange reaction from some of crew who started yelling at pirates after they had shot like: "Idiots, what the hell you are doing? Morons!" etc. I understood I had to stop the crew and prevent them from any provocative behavior.

“We blocked the bridge doors in order to repeat SOS message but they shot the door and I gave an order to AB to open it. They drew whole crew in one cabin (except Chief Officer) and put two guards with machineguns at the door. I tried to instruct the crew on how they must behave and not to provoke pirates but at this moment I saw resistance from our Bosun. He started to argue with me and to swear at pirates. It was a kind of ‘peacockery’. He played a hero but he was an idiot.” MF

A Ukrainian wife tells of her husband and son held at the same time

“My husband and 20 years old son were held on the same ship. After one and a half years back home they are both now back at sea. I hope that they are both psychologically and physically strong. They had no other profession to turn to so felt they had to go back to sea. It appeared that nobody cared when they were captured – ship owners, international organisations etc. However, our family will never forget the ordeal as it was a great pain to us, however it feels now like a greater pain that no organisation is protecting the human rights of these innocent seafarers working to support their families.”

A Ukrainian wife talks about her husband

“My husband was captured for 14 months. Once back at home it took a further 6 months for him to really feel like he was home. He didn’t want to hear the words ‘sea’, ‘work’, ‘pirate’, ‘Somalia’. After a year he felt he could start looking for work again, however, work that would avoid Somalia. He found a Taiwan to Australia route after 18 months from release. I know that every family member that has a relative going to sea has a fear of what might happen.”

A Ukrainian Seafarer tells of the pirates’ regime and punishments

“The Pirates has a very strict chain of command and were well organized. They had quite strict system of punishments and penalties. They put a kind of a price list with punishments on walls in order their soldiers could see it. And cheapest penalty started from US\$ 5000. Once I saw two of the pirates fought with each other and one of their officers shot one dead and then tied up the other in very uncomfortable position. Then he left tied guy for few hours on the open deck next to killed one.”

Another Ukrainian second officer tells of the effects on crew members

“Some of us became very aggressive and irritable but one guy was sitting all day long just whispering “We are gonna die” and he could had such attacks few times a day. Another time we saw one of our fellows (after having some bad news) went to the toilet having his belt in hand. For us his intention was so clear and we took his belt and laces off him and calmed him down.

As far as you know later after the release and after having another contract with the same Owner one of our fellows committed suicide. Owner has promised him to compensate his losses and sick pay if he would work another contract but vessel was approaching Gulf of Aden again and this guy signed off. Owner refused to pay him money (which our fellow desperately needed for treatment of his daughter) and he killed himself. “

A Ukrainian second officer speaks of the release and return home

“The release itself was a Big show. All those Government representatives, mass media and many promises that now we are in safe and will get rehabilitation, compensations and wages. We had ITF agreement but after our return Owner started his long and miserable game. He preferred not to pay even wages. I turned to Ukrainian Prosecutor’s office and after long court trials me and another 4 crew gained back pay. However we haven’t got any sick pay and compensations for our belongings so far

“I had strong headaches and only alcohol helped me to relief the pain. I was too aggressive could start fight on the street without any reason or could cross the road without stopping on red light. But fortunately my friends recommended me good psychotherapists (two twin ladies) who learned their techniques from Chinese old master. They call it Body Orientated Psychotherapy. And that’s really helped me. My mother says I became the same like before this voyage.”

List of guests attending the launch

Panel guests

Rear Admiral Ort, Chief of Staff of NATO's HQ in Northwood

Bishop Kalathiparambil, secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People

Cyrus Mody, International Maritime Bureau

Capt Andy Winbow, Assistant Secretary General, IMO

2nd.Engineer Chirag Bahri

Guests

Andrew Higgs, IUMI

Len Holder, Videotel

Janet Strode, IPTA

Suresh Idnani, IMHA

Jon Whitlow, ITF

Andy Buxton, ISAN

Tom Holmer, ITF Seafarers Trust.

Rodger MacDonald, IFS

Pauline Marchand, IGP&I

Maarten Versluis, NATO

Stein Hagalid, NATO

Kostiantyn Billiar, Deputy Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the IMO

Angus Miller, FCO

Kuba Szymanski, InterManager

Cherian Oommen, SIGTTO

MF

Kaushik Roy, MOL LNG

Suresh Idnani, IMHA

Hennie La Grange, ICMA,

Martin Foley, ICMA/AoS

Rodger MacDonald, IFS

Lynda Brockbank, Hostage UK

Ake Selander, OUIS

MPHRP staff

Peter Swift

Roy Paul

Alex Wallace

Toon van de Sande

MPHRP consultant

Dr Marion Gibson

Members of the press

Press liaison at the launch

Sam Dawson, ITF press officer, dawson_sam@itf.org.uk

MF

Photographer

Rob Murray

MPHRP partner organisations

BIMCO (The Baltic and International Maritime Council) www.bimco.org

ICMA (International Christian Maritime Association) www.icma.as

ICSW (International Committee on Seafarers Welfare) www.seafarerswelfare.org

IFSMA (International Federation of Shipmasters' Associations) www.ifsma.org

IGP&I (International Group of P&I Clubs) www.igpandi.org

IMB (International Maritime Bureau) www.icc-ccs.org/home/imb

IMEC (International Maritime Employers' Committee) www.imec.org.uk

IMHA (International Maritime Health Association) www.imha.net

Intercargo (International Association of Dry Cargo Shipowners) www.intercargo.org

InterManager (International Ship Managers' Association) www.intermanager.org

INTERTANKO www.intertanko.com

IPTA (International Parcel Tankers Association) www.ipta.org.uk

ISF (International Shipping Federation). www.marisec.org/isf

ISAN (International Seafarers Assistance Network) www.seafarerhelp.org

ITF (International Transport Workers' Federation) www.itfglobal.org

IUMI (International Union of Marine Insurance) www.iumi.com

OCIMF (Oil Companies International Marine Forum) www.ocimf.com

SIGTTO (Society of International Gas Tankers & Terminal Operators Ltd) www.sigtto.org