

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

IFSMA Calls for Stronger Protection of Merchant Seafarers in Armed Conflict

The International Federation of Shipmasters' Associations (IFSMA), representing more than **16,000 serving shipmasters** through its member associations worldwide, is an international non-governmental organisation in consultative status with the International Maritime Organization (IMO). As the recognised voice of the world's professional shipmasters, IFSMA advocates for the highest standards of maritime safety, environmental protection and the welfare of seafarers.

IFSMA expresses its deep concern over the continuing loss of merchant seafarers' lives in areas affected by armed conflict. Recent attacks on merchant vessels demonstrate the unacceptable risks faced by civilian seafarers who transport the food, energy, medicines and other essential goods on which the world depends.

Merchant seafarers are civilians. They are not participants in armed conflict and must never become legitimate military targets. The loss of civilian seafarers' lives must never be accepted as a cost of maintaining global trade.

International humanitarian law requires all parties to distinguish between military objectives and civilian shipping. Merchant vessels and their crews are entitled to protection under international law, and maritime exclusion zones must never become free-fire zones.

Seafarers have little or no influence over a ship's route, cargo or the commercial decisions that place them in conflict areas. They must receive accurate information on security risks and have the genuine right to decline service in high-risk areas, or to be safely repatriated, without dismissal, financial loss or other retaliation. Where service is undertaken voluntarily, it must be based on informed consent and supported by appropriate security measures, insurance and compensation.

Recognising the work undertaken by the IMO Secretary-General, IFSMA calls upon the United Nations, the IMO, the International Labour Organization (ILO), Member States, flag States, shipowners, charterers, insurers and all parties to armed conflicts to take immediate and practical measures to safeguard merchant ships and their crews.

Commercial considerations must never take precedence over human life. Shipowners must conduct robust risk assessments, while shipmasters must retain their overriding authority and responsibility to delay, divert or refuse a voyage where the safety of the ship or crew cannot be assured, without commercial or professional consequences.

The protection of merchant seafarers is a shared international responsibility. IFSMA stands in solidarity with the families of those who have lost their lives and reaffirms its commitment to working with the international maritime community to strengthen the legal and practical protection of seafarers worldwide.

No seafarer should lose their life simply for doing their job.

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