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Circular Letter No.5114
30 January 2026

To: All IMO Member States

Subject: **Call for Expressions of Interest (EOIs): Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa Project support for Integrated Educational Pilot for Green and Digital Shipping in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Overview of the Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa

1 The safety, efficiency, and sustainability of international shipping depend fundamentally on the competence, adaptability, and professionalism of the maritime workforce. The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW Convention), together with related IMO circulars, emphasizes the need for maritime education and training (MET) systems to evolve in response to technological innovation, environmental requirements, and changing operational practices. In particular, IMO guidance highlights the importance of continuous professional development, modernization of curricula, faculty upskilling, and the integration of emerging competencies related to environmental protection, alternative fuels, digitalization, and advanced shipboard systems.

2 In this context, the IMO and the European Union (EU) have launched the Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa Project. The Project is designed to support Member States in the region in developing a skilled, inclusive, and future-proof maritime workforce, capable of operating safely and effectively in a decarbonized and increasingly digitalized shipping sector. The FRS in Africa Project is implemented by the IMO and funded by the European Union.

3 Recognizing the specific needs and opportunities of Sub-Saharan African Member States, the IMO invites Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from eligible Member States to participate in an Integrated Educational Pilot for Green and Digital Shipping, aimed at strengthening maritime education and training institutions, enhancing faculty capacity, and improving access to modern training tools and learning pathways.

4 The selected beneficiary Member States will receive technical assistance under the Project to support regional and/or national maritime training institutions in the development and delivery of upgraded curricula on alternative fuels, biodiversity-sensitive operations, digital technologies, and maritime governance, thereby enabling a diverse cohort of seafarers, instructors, and port professionals to acquire new competencies through enhanced training programmes, scholarships, and industry-linked practical and sea-time experience.

Assistance provided by the FRS in Africa Project

5 Under the Integrated Educational Pilot for Green and Digital Shipping, the Future-Ready Shipping in Africa Project will provide technical assistance and programmatic support that may include:

- Development of "Green and Digital Seafaring" curricula;
- Incorporation of the following training modules into the curricula of participating maritime education and training institutions on:
 - environmentally-sustainable alternative fuels;
 - biodiversity-sensitive maritime operations;
 - digital navigation and smart shipping technologies; and
 - emissions monitoring and management;
- Identification of needs for simulators, laboratory equipment, and digital training tools to support alternative fuel and digital navigation training;
- Delivery of "train-the-trainer" programmes for local faculty on alternative fuels, digital technologies, and biodiversity-sensitive operations;
- Provision of scholarships and fellowships for underrepresented groups, with a particular focus on strengthening gender balance through support for women;
- Partnerships with shipping companies and industry stakeholders to provide practical internships and sea-time opportunities; and
- Delivery of capacity-building workshops and short courses for working seafarers, port professionals, and maritime administrators.

6 Please note that the assistance provided does not include any form of direct cash or financial assistance. The beneficiary Member State is expected to contribute in-kind support to facilitate local coordination, stakeholder engagement and related national activities. This includes, but is not limited to, coordination support, access to data, facilitation of stakeholder engagement, organizing local meetings or workshops, venue hire, catering, interpretation services, printing of materials or domestic travel.

Eligibility and expectations from the beneficiary Member State

7 The Expressions of Interests (EOIs) are invited from interested government entities in the Sub-Saharan Africa region (e.g. ministries, departments, agencies), including those responsible for maritime education and training, as well as regional or subregional maritime training institutions, where such institutions are nominated or endorsed by the relevant government authority.

8 Private sector entities may participate only as partners and may not submit EOIs independently.

9 Submissions must be made by, or formally endorsed by, the relevant government authority, such as the maritime administration, Ministry of Transport, or equivalent body.

10 The beneficiary Member State is expected to:

- Demonstrate commitment to strengthening maritime education and training in line with STCW requirements and IMO guidance;
- Nominate participating maritime training institutions and designate a national focal point;
- Facilitate coordination between academia, industry, and public authorities;
- Support inclusive participation, including gender balance and support for underrepresented groups; and
- Enable participation in training, validation, and evaluation activities.

Submission of Expressions of Interest (EOIs)

- 11 The EOIs should provide the below information (refer to the EOI template in the annex):
- Brief overview of the proposing Member State and nominated training institution(s);
 - Description of existing maritime education and training programmes;
 - Preliminary identification of programmes or modules related to green shipping, digitalization, and emissions management;
 - Proposed target groups (students, faculty, professionals) and planned inclusivity targets, measures to support participation of women and underrepresented groups;
 - Existing or planned partnerships with industry or academic institutions; and
 - Commitment letter from the government.

12 The EOIs must be submitted by official government entities (e.g. ministries, departments, agencies). Submissions from non-government organizations or the private sector must be endorsed by the respective Member State government entity.

13 Completed EOIs, along with governmental endorsement (preferably from the maritime administration), should be sent to frs@imo.org.

14 The deadline for submission of EOIs is **9 March 2026, 23:59 hrs** UK time. However, Member States are encouraged to submit their applications as early as possible.

15 Requests for further information or clarification should be directed to frs@imo.org.

16 The FRS in the Africa Project Coordination Unit will acknowledge receipt of all eligible EOIs following the closure of the submission deadline.

Evaluation and selection criteria

17 All Expressions of Interest (EOIs) received within the specified deadline will be reviewed and assessed by an Evaluation Committee, which will be comprised of the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) and an independent panel of technical and academic experts.

18 The Evaluation Committee will compile a shortlist of applications. Shortlisted EOIs may be requested to provide additional technical or contextual information prior to final selection.

19 The selection criteria will take into account:

- relevance and potential impact on green and digital maritime skills development;
- commitment of the proposing Member State and institution;
- alignment with STCW requirements and IMO guidance;
- potential for scalability and regional replication;
- contribution to gender balance and inclusive participation;
- absence of prior or ongoing IMO support providing similar assistance in this area; and
- identified institutional and capacity-building needs.

20 Based on this assessment, up to five (5) EOIs will be selected under the Future-Ready Shipping (FRS) in Africa project.

21 Following the evaluation, the proposed selection results will be submitted for final approval by the Project Steering Committee, in accordance with the Project's governance arrangements. The Project Coordination Unit will notify all applicant Member States of the outcome of the selection process following the Project Steering Committee's decision.

Evaluation and beneficiary selection process

22 The selection process for the Expressions of Interest (EOIs) will include the following steps:

- Submission of EOIs (by 9 March 2026, 23:59 hrs)
- Review of EOIs: Initial screening and evaluation against eligibility and selection criteria (by 16 March 2026)
- Reaching out to shortlisted EOIs: Additional technical and operational information requested for shortlisted EOIs (by 23 March 2026)
- Selection of the beneficiary: Confirmation of the project beneficiary based on the overall evaluation (8 April 2026)
- Implementation of activities starts (by mid-May 2026)

ANNEX

Expression of Interest template (not more than 5 pages)

- 1 General Information:
 - Proposing Member State:
 - Nominated training institution(s):
(Name, location, legal status, and brief mandate)

- 2 Overview of the proposing Member State and training institution(s)
Provide a brief overview of the proposing Member State's maritime sector and the role of the nominated maritime education and training (MET) institution(s), including:
 - Institutional mandate and governance structure
 - Experience in delivering STCW-compliant training
 - Role in national maritime capacity-building

- 3 Description of existing maritime education and training programmes
Describe the current MET programmes offered by the nominated institution(s), including:
 - Academic and vocational programmes
 - STCW certification courses and competency levels
 - Modes of delivery (classroom, simulator-based, e-learning, blended)
 - Quality assurance and accreditation arrangements

- 4 Preliminary identification of relevant programmes or modules
Identify existing or planned programmes, courses, or modules related to:
 - Green shipping and maritime decarbonization
 - Digitalization of maritime operations
 - Emissions monitoring, reporting, and management

Where applicable, briefly indicate:

 - Level (introductory, advanced, professional)
 - Alignment with IMO guidance and model courses
 - Gaps or areas requiring further development

- 5 Target groups and inclusivity measures
Describe the proposed target groups and inclusivity approach, including:
 - Intended beneficiaries (e.g. students, faculty, maritime professionals, regulators)
 - Planned participation numbers (indicative)
 - Measures to promote inclusivity, including:
 - Participation of women
 - Engagement of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups
 - Scholarships, outreach, flexible delivery, or other support mechanisms

- 6 Partnerships and collaboration
Outline any existing or planned partnerships relevant to the proposed EOIs, including:
- Collaboration with maritime industry stakeholders
 - Partnerships with academic or research institutions
 - Engagement with maritime administrations or regional bodies
 - Nature and scope of collaboration (training delivery, curriculum development, placements, research, etc.)
- 7 Government commitment
Attach a Commitment letter from the Government, confirming:
- Endorsement of the EOI submission
 - Support for the nominated training institution(s)
 - Commitment to facilitating the implementation and sustainability of the proposed activities
 - Alignment with national maritime education, training, and decarbonization priorities
- 8 Contact Information:
- Focal point name and title:
 - Institution/organization:
 - Email and telephone:
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