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Circular Letter No.4204/Add.33
5 November 2020

To: All IMO Member States
United Nations and specialized agencies
Intergovernmental organizations
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO

Subject: **Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Joint Statement IMO-UNWTO to support the safe resumption of cruise ship operations following the COVID-19 pandemic**

The Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) have jointly issued the attached statement to express their support for the safe resumption of cruise ship operations following the COVID-19 pandemic and to encourage their Member States and relevant national and local authorities to designate all seafarers and marine personnel within their jurisdictions (not only nationals) as key workers providing an essential service and to remove any barriers to crew changes.

According to information from the cruise industry, about 30 million passengers cruised in 2019. Cruising generates \$150 billion for the global economy every year and supports 1.2 million jobs, paying \$50 billion in wages and accounting for over 30% of total exports for the majority of SIDS and up to 80% for some. The statement includes relevant information on recently launched initiatives to enable recovery of the cruise sector, and Member States are invited to use this information to ensure safe conditions for the health of crew, passengers and the population of port States during the pandemic.

Member States and international organizations are encouraged to bring the statement to the attention of the responsible health, immigration, border control and maritime authorities, at both national and local levels; as well as all other parties concerned, in particular ports.

ANNEX



**JOINT STATEMENT TO SUPPORT THE SAFE RESUMPTION
OF CRUISE SHIP OPERATIONS FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

5 November 2020

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has placed the world in an unprecedented situation. To slow the spread of the disease and mitigate its impacts, travel is being curtailed and borders are being closed.

More than 80% of global trade by volume is carried by maritime transport which moves the world's food, energy and raw materials, as well as manufactured goods and components, and is vital to sustainable development and prosperity.

Maritime transport is dependent on the 2 million seafarers who operate the world's merchant ships. It is estimated that currently about 400,000 seafarers are working beyond their original contracts, with a further 400,000 waiting ashore to relieve them. IMO has provided comprehensive guidance to the shipping industry and to Member Governments through the Circular Letter No.4204 series, including provisions to facilitate safe and secure crew change operations.

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) both acknowledge the critical role of the maritime sector in keeping trade flowing during the global fight against COVID-19.

Due to the pandemic, 850 million to 1.1 billion fewer international tourist arrivals are expected worldwide, which means a loss of \$910 billion to \$1.2 trillion in export revenues from tourism, putting 100 to 120 million of direct tourism-related jobs at risk.

Regarding the cruise sector, about 30 million passengers cruised in 2019. The tourism sector is providing important socio-economic benefits for Small Island States, sustaining millions of livelihoods in these countries, accounting for over 30% of total exports for the majority of SIDS and up to 80% for some¹. Since WHO declared the global pandemic, Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) member cruise lines announced a voluntary suspension of operations worldwide, making the sector one of the first to do so. According to information from the cruise industry, cruising contributes \$150 billion to the global economy every year and supports 1.2 million jobs, paying \$50 billion in wages. Suspending cruise operations through July 2020 resulted in \$50.24 billion in total economic loss, representing over 334,000 jobs and \$14.75 billion in wages.

¹ World Tourism Organization, Tourism in SIDS: the challenge of sustaining livelihoods in times of COVID-19, UNWTO Briefing Note – *Tourism and Covid-19*, Issue 2, June 2020



During this time of suspension, the cruise industry has been reviewing and enhancing their protocols to determine ways to go further in the protection of the health of passengers, crew and the general public. Different initiatives to recover the cruise sector have recently been launched, recommending minimum measures expected to be implemented by all parties concerned, while maintaining general safety and security standards, e.g. the *Guidance on the gradual and safe resumption of operations of cruise ships in the European Union in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic*² developed by EMSA and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the three framework documents (operator framework, passenger framework and seafarer framework)³ developed by the United Kingdom Chamber of Shipping together with CLIA, which identify, measure and provide recommendations on the resumption of cruise ship operations from the United Kingdom in the context of the pandemic.

Governments are invited to use the above-mentioned guidance to facilitate the recovery of the cruise sector under safe conditions for the health of crew, passengers and the population of port States during the pandemic.

Joining the call of the United Nations Secretary-General in his Policy Brief: COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism,⁴ IMO and UNWTO recognize the importance of the cruise sector for the world economy and also the efforts made by the cruise industry, countries and international organizations to protect the safety, health and well-being of passengers and crew, and the health of the population of destination port States of cruise ships. The resumption of cruise ship operations also benefits the broader maritime community in that they participate in AMVER and are often requested by Rescue Coordination Centres to offer assistance to ships in distress at sea.

We encourage Governments and relevant national and local authorities to designate all seafarers and marine personnel within their jurisdiction (not only nationals) as key workers providing an essential service and to remove any barriers to crew changes.

We further encourage the cruise industry and Governments to continue their efforts to enable the safe resumption of cruise operations.

	
Zurab Pololikashvili Secretary-General World Tourism Organization	Kitack Lim Secretary-General International Maritime Organization

² <http://emsa.europa.eu/emsa-documents/latest/item/3978-covid-19-eu-guidance-for-cruise-ship-operations.html>

³ <https://ukchamberofshipping.com/latest/industry-comes-together-develop-new-covid-19-framework-cruise-operators/>

⁴ https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/sg_policy_brief_covid-19_tourism_august_2020.pdf