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Circular Letter No.4236  
26 March 2020

To: All IMO Members  
Intergovernmental organizations  
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status

Subject: **Communication from the Government of the United Kingdom of Great  
Britain and Northern Ireland**

The Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland sent the attached communication, dated 23 March 2020, with the request that it is circulated by the Organization.

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Department  
for Transport

From the Parliamentary  
Under Secretary of State  
**Kelly Tolhurst MP**

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Guy Ryder, Director General,  
International Labour Organization

Kitack Lim, Secretary-General,  
International Maritime Organization

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,  
Director General,  
World Health Organization

23 March 2020

Dear Guy, Kitack and Tedros,

**UK COMMITMENT TO SEAFARER WELFARE DURING COVID-19  
PANDEMIC AND TO CONTINUE TO FACILITATE SEAFARER TRANSIT  
AND TRANSFER TO KEEP WORLD TRADE MOVING**

In these extraordinary times I would like to reassure you that the United Kingdom (UK) is fully committed to the welfare of seafarers of all nationalities. I want to assure all of you that the UK will continue to recognise our commitments under the international conventions regarding the transit and transfer of seafarers and their right to access shore leave.

Seafarers are the lifeblood of the world's economy. As a coastal, port and flag State the UK recognises the critical position that seafarers hold in both the UK and the global economy. More than ever, we need to ensure that freight is able to flow inwards and outwards of the country, and that global trade continues for the benefit of all citizens and the global economy.

We are committed to keeping UK ports open and do not propose to restrict the transit or transfer of seafarers through the UK or to restrict access to shore leave. We want to ensure that seafarers and those at the ports are protected and have in place robust measures to ensure the safety of all persons.

We respect the right of States to close borders but we ask them to consider the facilitation of the transit and transfer of seafarers wherever possible. It is

critical to the health and welfare of every State and to their own and the global economies that we ensure that supply chains remain open and collectively we do not restrict the movement of vessels and seafarers.

We ask States to allow vessels to change crew to ensure the health and welfare of individuals and for the safety of the vessel. We ask States to show compassion when there are sick on board and to not turn away vessels, their crew or their passengers.

We will endeavour to provide appropriate treatment for any seafarer should they become ill. We also recognise that seafarers will be concerned about family and loved ones back home and will facilitate access to shore leave or to transit home.

We also recognise that seafarers may be wary of accessing shore and prefer to stay on board. This is to be respected and where possible, access to communication facilities should be provided to allow contact with home or to seek welfare or spiritual guidance.

We ask of the International Maritime Organization, the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization for clear joint international guidance and direction to port States, flag States and coastal States supporting seafarers and ship operators.



**KELLY TOLHURST MP**

**MINISTER FOR AVIATION, MARITIME AND SECURITY**