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Circular Letter No.4259
9 April 2020

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

Subject: **Communication from the Republic of Korea**

The Government of the Republic of Korea has sent the attached communication, dated 6 April 2020, with the request that it is circulated by the Organization.



H.E. Kitack LIM
Secretary-General
International Maritime Organization

6 April 2020

Re: COVID-19 measures & suggestions for preventing international trade disruptions

Your Excellency,

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to your Excellency for the swift and adequate actions in response to COVID-19 outbreak including information sharing and pragmatic and practical approaches to conventions to apply, on behalf of the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea.

It is my pleasure to inform you of the measures my government has taken and suggestions that both are for the continuing operation of maritime transport carrying around 90% of world trade, while G20 leaders have recently stressed the uninterrupted global supply chains to ensure access to medical supplies and other goods & services to contain the pandemic.

The Republic of Korea has effectively promoted an embracing policy at ports to impose no restrictions on ships' arrivals and departures under the relevant international conventions. This principle would facilitate seamless crew changes and repatriation as all seafarers regardless of their nationality, on the condition of preventive and quarantine measures, are allowed to embark, disembark, travel within the territory and gain access to medical service, if necessary.

Contingency measures are also in place, attached herewith for your reference, to avoid unnecessary disruptions to ship operation, consisting of remote ship inspection & audit scheme and special extension of the validity of certificates.

Committed to the abovementioned efforts to accelerate, I would like to take an extra step with some suggestions for globally bolder actions and greater cooperation.

The Korean government gives its full support to timely and decisive actions of the international community to contain the spread of the virus, as evidenced by a *Preliminary list of recommendations for Governments and relevant national authorities on the facilitation of maritime trade during the COVID-19 pandemic* that 16 international organizations in the maritime sector, including ICS and BIMCO, have recently proposed.

It is expected that all nations will participate in the industrial recommendations to maintain the functionality of shipping; and protect the rights and welfare of seafarers.



In addition, we would like to encourage the IMO to take the initiative to employ more binding measures to avoid the suspension of international trade (*e.g. UN Resolution or its equivalent level*) in cooperation with the relevant international organizations like UNCTAD, ILO, WTO and WHO.

Painfully reminded of the crucial role of global preparedness and solidarity to maritime transport, the Korean government would like to reiterate its strong commitment to ensure the safety of ships, seafarers and marine personnel at ports with respect for their work as a key workforce providing essential services.

Yours Sincerely,

MOON, Seong-Hyeok
Minister of Oceans and Fisheries
Republic of Korea

ANNEX

Contingency Guidelines for Ships and Seafarers against Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Scope

The guidelines apply to all Korean-flagged ships, fishing vessels and seafarers who bear the certificates issued by the Republic of Korea until further guidance is provided.

In applying the guidelines, IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.5 dated 17 March, 2020 and Circular Letter 2020-1('20.3.2), 2020-2('20.3.12) of Port State Control in the Asia-Pacific Region have been referred to by the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries.

Background

Due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, various restrictions have been placed on the arrival and departure of ships and the transfer of seafarers as well as the movement of surveyors and auditors for surveys/audits between countries and survey on board, making it difficult to comply with the regulations set out in the various international conventions.

The Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea, in considering the COVID-19 outbreak as a force majeure, has decided to take the following temporary measures for the Korean-flagged ships and seafarers.

The validity of ship's certificates

When a ship, which is not able to undergo survey or audit due to the COVID-19, makes a request to extend the validity of the certificate in order to move to a place where survey or audit is possible, the government of the Republic of Korea will grant an extension for up to 3 to 6 months in accordance with the relevant International Convention standards.

A ship can request the details on the extension of the validity of the certificate from the Recognized Organizations (ROs)**.

* Ship survey certificate, international agreement certificate, ship safety management certificate, international ship security certificate (three months), interim ship safety management certificate (six months), etc.

** Korean Register (KR), Bureau Veritas (BV), Korea Maritime Transportation Safety Authority (KOMSA)

Remote surveys, etc.

The Republic of Korea has decided to temporarily adopt remote surveys, etc. in the following manner, provided that it is not possible for a ship surveyor or auditor to perform a survey or audit in the work site due to COVID-19.

* (Procedure) (Shipowner) Application → (Recognized Organization) Review of submitted documents → (If necessary) Approval/consultation of Government → (Recognized Organization) Conduct remote surveys, etc. → (If passed) Endorsement/issuance/sending of survey report/certificate → (Recognized Organization) Report to the Ministry

- Ship survey: If it is not possible for a ship surveyor to conduct a survey on board, a remote survey using photographs, online interview, etc. can be adopted in case of simple surveys, including a temporary survey, which do not hinder the safe operation of ships or fishing vessels.

- Audit to attest the ship safety management system: If it is not possible for an auditor to conduct an audit on board an ocean-going vessel of Korean flag, for interim audit, it can be carried out remotely by using a satellite telephone, EMS, etc.

* For the vessel that has passed the remote audit, the certificate is issued on the condition that the vessel will undergo a site visit and confirmation later on.

- Audit to attest the ship security management system: If it is not possible for an auditor to conduct a security audit at a foreign port during the audit period, for interim, temporary and renewal audits, they can be carried out remotely by using mail, fax, video telephone, etc. (except for initial audit)

Crew changes, employment period and validity of certificates

In order to prevent Korean-flagged vessels, which may not be able to comply with the requirements of International Conventions pertaining to crew changes, employment period and the validity of seafarers' certificates due to COVID-19, from being subjected to unnecessary detention at foreign ports, the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries will provide an official letter requesting the Port Authority to cooperate, when requested by shipowners.

The official letter, which is a measure based on the Joint Statement IMO-WHO and guidelines from Port State Control in the Asia-Pacific Region, is issued to provide explanation that the non-compliance with the requirements of international conventions is due to COVID-19. When it comes to the extension of maximum period of work on board, the health and safety of seafarers are considered as the top priority and such extension is only granted when it is agreed by the seafarer involved.

Port State Control

Based on guidelines from Port State Control in the Asia-Pacific Region, the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea has decided to conduct Port State Control inspections for foreign vessels calling at Korean ports by taking the pragmatic approach as follows:

- Pragmatic PSC inspections: When a plan or process containing equivalent solutions to address the COVID-19 and letters of dispensation or exemption by the flag State is presented to Port State Authority, PSC inspections will be conducted by taking the pragmatic approach after its relevance to COVID-19 is confirmed.

Providing relevant information

This contingency plan has been developed taking into account the currently applicable information concerning the COVID-19 crisis. Any significant developments necessitating a revision of this document will be considered by the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries.

For further regularly updated information visit <http://www.mof.go.kr/eng>

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