

**Joint IMO/ILO Conference on Work at Sea
IMO Headquarters, London**

13 November 2023

**Closing remarks by Mr Gilbert F. Houngbo
ILO Director-General**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I have been impressed by the richness of your discussions and your commitment towards the protection of seafarers and fishers.

2. In concluding, I would like to highlight the following points:
 - There is no doubt that we can all be proud of the progress made to enhance the protection of seafarers with the MLC and the work of the Special Tripartite Committee which has adopted amendments regarding – among others – abandonment, harassment and bullying, and social connectivity.
 - As clearly stated in the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly during COVID, and as recalled by many today, seafarers are key workers and they deserve to be treated as such.
 - We have heard today several references to due diligence and in this regard, we must continue working to ensure that everyone understands that maritime transport is a key part of supply chains.
 - As affirmed by shipowners, retaining seafarers is very challenging. Therefore, making work at sea as attractive as possible is an essential task. Seafarers need to feel valued and respected. Shipowners and ship managers have shared important examples of how this can be done.
 - The pandemic created a humanitarian crisis for seafarers that should never be repeated. But, as we have heard today, it was also a period during which responsible governments, together with shipowners and seafarers and a number of UN agencies, including ILO and IMO, took remarkable measures to guarantee seafarers' rights. The lessons learnt must continue to result in concrete action.
 - Concerning the maritime regulatory framework and enforcement, we have heard today critical reflections about what else is needed. In this regard:

- more visibility should be given to the important work of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, which supervises the implementation of the MLC, 2006 and the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No 188); as mentioned earlier by Professor Athanassiou, seafarers' and shipowners' organizations are invited to participate more actively in the monitoring system by drawing attention to systematic issues of non-compliance.
- Seafarers' fatigue must be thoroughly examined and effectively addressed by both the ILO and IMO: this is directly linked to issues of minimum manning, long working hours and the extended periods that seafarers spend at sea.
- Additional measures should be taken to support the invaluable work of flag state and port state control inspectors. In particular, they should be further familiarized with the provisions of ILO conventions.
- We must also enhance efforts to increase women's participation in shipping, and adopt the measures needed to ensure they feel safe on board.
- Recruitment agencies, which are key players in the maritime sector, should be further regulated and monitored to prevent abuses of seafarers' and fishers' rights.
- We must continue working together to promote key fishing sector instruments and ensure the protection of the fundamental principles and rights of fishers, including by eliminating the scourge of forced labour.
- We must make sure that seafarers and fishers know their rights. On this issue, we have launched the idea of a possible inclusion of a mandatory training on the MLC, 2006 for all seafarers, as part of the ongoing revision of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers. We welcome support for this, or any other initiative that might enhance awareness of the MLC and the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No 188).

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. The maritime industry has developed an ambitious strategy for decarbonization and is actively engaged in dealing with the impact of digitalization and automation. Concerning these two aspects, we must ensure that we deliver the necessary training to seafarers and make sure that technology contributes to the continued improvement of working conditions.
4. Let us further intensify cooperation between the IMO and the ILO and commit to a new social contract for shipping based on social dialogue, respect for rights including decent wages paid on time, the principles of just transition and a human-centred approach to the use of technologies.
5. This is urgently needed to ensure the wellbeing of seafarers and fair competition among shipowners. It will also contribute to safety in navigation and to cleaner oceans.
6. Finally, as stated by the ILO Committee of experts, it is precisely at times of crisis that the protective coverage of ILO standards assumes its full significance. In this regard, I would like to conclude by calling on all ILO and IMO Member States to respect the safety of seafarers in the context of war.
7. In conclusion, let me thank once again all those who made this Conference possible.

Thank you.