

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

13 November 2023

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

His Excellency, Mr Yildirim, Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkiye,

Mr Lim, Secretary-General of the IMO,

Mr Platten, Secretary General of the ICS,

Mr Cotton, Secretary General of the ITF,

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Allow me to first thank IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim and his team for the organization of this important Conference in collaboration with the ILO.
2. IMO and ILO agreed to convene this unique event, moved by the conviction that more needs to be done to effectively protect seafarers and fishers, in particular in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. In 2006, the ILO adopted the Maritime Labour Convention. Today, this “seafarers bill of rights” has become the fourth pillar of the international maritime regime. Impressive efforts have been made worldwide to ensure that this Convention has a concrete impact on seafarers’ lives.
4. ITF and ICS have played and continue to play a crucial role in this success.
5. In 2007, the ILO adopted another very important instrument to protect living and working conditions for fishers: the Work in Fishing Convention.
6. This instrument has now reached 21 ratifications.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. In spite of the tremendous progress made, numerous challenges remain.
8. Fishers continue to face many decent work deficits, including for some, denial of their fundamental principles and rights at work. ILO and IMO, together with the Food and

Agriculture Organization, have expanded their cooperation in this sector. However, progress remains slow.

9. We therefore need to accelerate action towards the ratification and implementation of key ILO and IMO fishing Conventions.
10. Many seafarers, for their part, continue to be confronted with unpaid wages, long periods of service on board, fatigue, limited access to social connectivity, abandonment, criminalization, bullying and harassment, denial of shore leave, lack of access to welfare facilities and fraudulent practices by recruitment agencies.
11. In this context, if we want to retain and attract seafarers, including young persons and women, we need to deliver on a new social contract that puts seafarers at the heart of the shipping industry.
12. Allow me to briefly share the key elements of such a contract.
13. First, it has to be based on social dialogue, relying on representative shipowners' and seafarers' organizations that are the best placed to know what are the most urgent issues and the best solutions to address them.
14. The second key element is a renewed commitment by all parties to effectively respect seafarers' rights. We need to secure universal ratification and full enforcement of the MLC, including through intensifying our joint work with the IMO.
15. At the same time, we should not forget that the MLC embodies minimum standards and that efforts should be made to progressively enhance the protection it provides.
16. Third, we must ensure that the changes needed to cut greenhouse gasses and protect the marine environment are achieved through a just transition. This also means to address the impact on seafarers by providing the necessary training to safely use new equipment and fuels.
17. Finally, a new social contract must ensure a human-centred approach to the use of new technologies and guarantee that artificial intelligence, automation and digitalization result in improvements of seafarers' working conditions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

18. I am confident that working together we can rise to the challenge and ensure that seafarers and fishers receive the protection they deserve.

19. I look forward to listening to the discussions and learning more from the rich experiences of panellists and participants.

Thank you.