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

Subject: **Ratification of the Cape Town Agreement of 2012 – Communication from the Secretary-General**

1 The journey for bringing a binding safety regime for fishing vessels into force began in Torremolinos, Spain, back in 1977 with the adoption of the Torremolinos International Convention for the Safety of Fishing Vessels. In 1993, the Torremolinos Protocol was adopted but it also did not achieve the desired level of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession due to legal and technical difficulties. Thus, in 2012, the Cape Town Agreement was adopted to address the aforementioned difficulties and to facilitate ratification of a binding instrument establishing an international safety regime for fishing vessels.

2 In order to promote the Agreement, a Ministerial Conference on Fishing Vessel Safety and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing was organized by IMO in collaboration with the Government of Spain, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Pew Charitable Trusts, in Torremolinos, Spain, in October 2019. The Conference was attended by over 125 States, some 70 Ministerial and Ambassador-level representatives and 30 international organizations. At the Conference, 48 States signed the Torremolinos Declaration to indicate their determination to ratify the Agreement by its tenth anniversary (i.e. 11 October 2022), thereby moving a significant step closer to bringing it into force. The Declaration has now been signed by 51 States.

3 The treaty will enter into force 12 months after at least 22 States with an aggregate number of fishing vessels of 24 metres in length and over operating on the high seas of no less than 3,600 have expressed their consent to be bound by it. As of today, six months in advance of the above-mentioned target date, 17 States have ratified the Agreement, with 1925 vessels declared.

4 The entry into force of the Agreement will establish an international regime for fishing vessel safety, thereby making a significant contribution to the protection of fishers, an unacceptable high number of whom lose their lives every year. Such an international regime would also help to contribute to the broader fight against IUU fishing activities. This would help to protect world fish stocks, ensure fair competition in fishing, better working conditions, and protect fishers from human rights abuses. Additionally, such a regime would help to reduce marine litter from fishing vessels, and reduce search and rescue (SAR) missions involving State SAR services, merchant and naval fleets, as well as fishing vessels, responding to distress calls from substandard fishing vessels.

5 The IMO Secretariat, in collaboration with other international organizations, has been taking a number of steps to increase the number of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession to finally bring the Agreement into force. These steps include:

- .1 sponsoring national and regional seminars and webinars organized in cooperation with Member States, FAO, International Labour Organization (ILO), Pew Charitable Trusts, and other industry partners to further promote the entry into force and implementation of the Agreement;
- .2 strengthening interagency cooperation among FAO, ILO and IMO, in particular in the field of combatting IUU fishing and improving working and living conditions on fishing vessels through the FAO/ILO/IMO Joint Working Group on IUU Fishing and Related Matters;
- .3 assisting individual Member States to address their specific technical and legal difficulties in ratifying the Agreement; and
- .4 developing a comprehensive and informative [web-portal](#), which has been visited by more than 7,000 users since its launch in 2020.

6 More than 45 years after the adoption of the first international treaty to address the safety of vessels, a binding safety regime for fishing vessels is still not force, which is a critical step to saving lives in one of the most perilous human activities. It will also protect resources and contribute to sustainable, legal and transparent fisheries, whilst caring for the marine environment, as well as providing fishers with better working and living conditions.

7 IMO Member States, IMO affiliate organizations, and all other actors of the maritime sector are invited to take action to achieve the entry into force of the Cape Town Agreement of 2012 in order to meet the goal set up in the 2019 Torremolinos Declaration. The IMO Secretariat will remain committed to providing technical and legal support where necessary to achieve this long-awaited milestone in achieving increased maritime safety in the fishing sector. The Secretariat can be contacted at fvs@imo.org for further information.

8 We cannot afford to be complacent when it comes to addressing safety of fishers and fishing vessels. I remain confident that by working together, we will ensure the Agreement enters into force to complete the missing pillar for safe, sustainable and legal fishing. Rest assured that I will do my utmost to achieve this goal.

Kitack Lim, Secretary-General
