

## **Speech by H.E. Captain Ian Finley**

### **Recipient of the International Maritime Prize for 2023**

**Delivered at the Annual IMO Awards Ceremony, London on 2 December 2024**

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Kia Orana ,

Secretary General , Chairs of the Council and the Maritime Safety Committee ,  
Excellencies , Distinguished Delegates , Guests and importantly the recipients of the  
IMO Bravery Awards.

Firstly, let me thank you Secretary General for your kind and gracious words, we go  
back a long time and I must confess to having had some trepidation as to what  
flotsam and jetsam of mine you may have recycled. My thanks also to Secretary  
General Emeritus Kitack Lim for his warm message of congratulations.

I must of course also thank the Government of the Cook Islands for the nomination  
for the International Maritime Prize and for the trust and confidence they have placed  
in me as their Permanent Representative at the IMO to project their maritime needs  
and interests over the past eighteen years . I have been blessed to have worked  
with the wonderful team at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs led by Secretary Tapaeru  
Herrmann, together with Directors of Treaties and Oceans Division, Josh Mitchell  
and Sandrina Thondoo , who with the Islands total reliance on shipping have been  
directly engaged in IMO affairs. It has been the highlight of what has been a many  
faceted career.

I am grateful to the Council and membership of the IMO for endorsing my nomination for the Maritime Prize in recognition of my three decades of service to this specialised technical agency of the United Nations. I am truly grateful, yet I see this Prize as a recognition of the work and commitment of so many who I have worked with over the past three decades, the true stalwarts of the IMO who have tirelessly devoted themselves to facilitating world trade through promoting safe, secure, environmentally sound, efficient and sustainable shipping:-

Marja Tiemens, Koichi Yoshida, Dumisani Ntuli , Greg Shark, Turid Stemre , Neil Ferrer, Rosalie Balkin , Nicholas Charambolous, David Tongue , Bryan Wood Thomas , Olga Pestel Lefèvre,, Katy Ware and so many more unsung heroes.

I was born and raised on the banks of the River Mersey, my father worked and laboured in the Birkenhead shipyards, my mother a seamstress.

From school we would walk down to the embankment to gaze in wonder at the line of cargo ships lying in the stream waiting to be locked in for their berths with cargoes from every point of the compass, with the cross Mersey Ferries dodging between their bows and sterns. I recall the Funnels and house flags of the shipping lines that called Liverpool home, days of past glory, most of them now confined to history. The stately trans-Atlantic Cunarders , Athel, Bibby, Blue Star , Booths, Brocklebank , the "Empress "Boats of Canadian Pacific , Clan Line, Elder Dempster, Ellermans , Harrisons , the Isle of Man Steam Packet , Moss Hutchinson , New Zealand Shipping Company , P&O ,Port Line , Royal Mail, Shaw Savill & Albion , Union Castle and those cargo ships of elegant lines and beauty the Blue Funnel Line of Alfred Holts & Co . Little did I know then that I would one day sail from the River Mersey at the start of my life adventure.....

It is now 63 years since I left on the night tide from Liverpool on my first voyage to the Far East as a Midshipman on the Blue Funnel cargo ship "Elpenor" it seems like yesterday, and what a voyage it has been over the ensuing years in both fair and stormy weather!

You will of course be intrigued to hear my yarns and recollections of what has truly been a momentous voyage, alas time precludes my addressing this in any detail, but you will have seen the course I have taken in the nomination for the Prize , or will have the opportunity to hear in the remarkable monologue I shall deliver on my eagerly anticipated forthcoming Anteros world tour ; so you will forgive me if tonight I devote no more than a minute to each of those 63 years, so do make yourselves comfortable.

Life is nought but a series of circumstances that influence and ultimately direct the course taken , I have been fortunate by the opportunities that have presented themselves and yes which I have seized and acted on; you need luck as you navigate through this life but by and large given the circumstance you make your own luck , through hard work ,determination `and resilience while endeavouring not to repeat the mistakes made on life's voyage .... of which I have made many!

There are those that I must recognise for the impact they have had on my life and career and without whom I would not be here today as the recipient of this extraordinary honour, my devoted parents of course who worked , and I mean worked , long and hard in the tough industrial environment of Merseyside to ensure I got the best education and character-building opportunity through which my early opportunities arose.

My first love and inspiration, Diane, girlfriend at 15, wife at 20 , who passed away when she was only 28 and whose star shines in the firmament . Her legacy lives on in her children and grandchildren and it is to her memory that I dedicate this prestigious award .

R.E Hutson of Alfred Holt & Co, the Blue Funnel Line who in 1961 granted me the apprenticeship despite my disappointing “O” Level results;

Capt W.A. Meneight of Athel Line Ltd, a gentleman of the old school and an inspirational shipmaster who in 1966 saw promise in an uncertificated Third Mate, yes yet again I had had disappointing examination results, and who then gave me berth as his Second Mate as soon as I got my first ticket with rapid promotion following thereafter with ANCO in the fledgling chemical tanker industry ; These were good yesrs !

Per Hahn and Alan Milligan of Stolt-Nielsen who after the merger with PanOcean - Anco in 1982. brought me ashore in Stolt's General Operations and subsequently into the exciting world of commercial shipping, chartering and general management .

Bruce Fox of Botany Bay Shipping and founder of IPTA in 1987, a tough no nonsense Aussie yet a good mate in stormy weather:

Captain Al Fiore who first asked me to assist Panama here at IMO in 1991, and Olga Bosquez , now O'Neil with whom I established Panama's Permanent Mission to the IMO in 1995 .

The rest is history that would not have played out without the extraordinary support of an IMO Secretariat, including the amazing Interpreters, that have throughout the past three decades, and despite the frustrations they may all too often have felt with

me, given freely of their time and expertise. Part of that was a remarkable leader, mentor and friend Willam O'Neill.

Secretary General, colleagues I think it is apt and becoming that I have been the recipient of the Maritime Prize here during the MSC in what is the 50th anniversary of the 1974 SOLAS Convention. As you all know the SOLAS Convention in its successive forms is the most important of all international treaties concerning the safety of ships and the Seafarers that crew them; indeed SOLAS is the very pillar that IMO was founded on and nothing that we do here at the Organisation can or should take precedence over the SOLAS Convention. SOLAS is fundamental to all and any issue that we address not the least the protection of the Marine Environment that cannot be achieved without the Safe and Secure Shipping that SOLAS delivers. This we both recognise and emphasise in the 2024 World Maritime theme; - "Navigating the Future Safety comes First " .

As I look across the plenary in this hallowed hall I see many familiar faces , I also see behind the national cards the faces of those who have left us , the legends that I was fortunate to know , learn from and work with and who contributed so much to the Organisations mandate for developing and maintaining a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping ; the irrepressible Lindy Johnson who left us far too soon , Captain Sdougos , Christian Breinholt, Yoshio Sasamura , Giuliano Pattofatto, Pieter Bergmeijer , Igor Ponomarev,

Martin Böckenhauer , Mandana Mansoorian and of course Captain David Bruce.

There were others, many others, who have led by their example, I remember them all .

Finally allow me to acknowledge my family for their support and understanding of a father all too often absent across the world's oceans during their formative years and when in shipping ashore constantly on the move. A tough upbringing that instilled the virtues of self-reliance, hard work and motivated them to succeed, it worked, and I am so very proud of their success in their chosen fields. To Janet , a formidable industry representative in her own right and for many years a flag bearer for women in the maritime sector , my thanks for her forbearance .

Secretary General , colleagues that's 63 years in ships and shipping, from the river of my birth to the lands where corals lie , all gone in what seems just a turn of the tide;

Triumph and tragedy, despair and elation, endings but always new horizons; regrets, none to dwell on , what an Odyssey, what a life !

Thank you and Fair Winds and Smooth Sailing to you all .....