

2024 IMO HONOURS FOR EXCEPTIONAL BRAVERY AT SEA

Recipients of the Award

1. Captain Avhilash Rawat and the crew of the oil tanker **Marlin Luanda**, nominated by the Marshall Islands, for their extraordinary courage, determination and endurance demonstrated while coordinating fire fighting and damage control efforts to combat the fire that broke out after an anti-ship ballistic missile struck their vessel.

On the evening of 26 January 2024, the **Marlin Luanda**, carrying 84,147 tons of Naphtha, was en route from Suez to Incheon when it was struck by an anti-ship ballistic missile. The explosion ignited a cargo tank, creating a significant fire hazard with flames exceeding 5 metres. Despite the damage, Captain Avhilash Rawat swiftly organized fire-fighting efforts, ensuring the crew's safety and maintaining the ship's navigability amidst the chaos. With the starboard lifeboat destroyed, the remaining crew mustered at the port lifeboat station, ready for potential evacuation. Despite the extreme danger and the constant threat of further attacks, the crew fought the fire using fixed foam monitors and portable hoses. The fire continued to spread, particularly affecting an adjacent tank, but the crew managed to contain it using seawater after foam supplies were exhausted.

After 4.5 hours fighting the fire on their own, assistance arrived from the merchant tanker **Achilles**, and later from the French frigate **FS Alsace** and the United States frigate **USS Carney**, which provided additional fire-fighting foam and support, followed soon after by the Indian warship **INS Visakhapatnam**. Despite relentless efforts by the **Marlin Luanda**'s crew, the fire reignited multiple times. The situation remained critical, and expert consultations suggested abandoning the vessel. However, Captain Rawat and his crew persisted. The turning point came when professionally trained fire-fighters from the Indian Navy boarded the ship. They managed to get closer to the fire due to their superior equipment and their efforts, combined with those of the **Marlin Luanda**'s crew, finally succeeded in extinguishing the fire and sealing a significant hull breach. Twenty-four hours after the missile strike, the **Marlin Luanda** sailed to safety under naval escort.

2. Captain Jorge Fernando Galaviz Fuentes and the crew of the tugboat **Pemex Maya**, nominated by Mexico, for their outstanding courage, seamanship skills and resolve displayed in the rescue of six shipwrecked persons from four different vessels, in extreme weather and heavy seas caused by a hurricane.

On 25 October 2023, hurricane Otis struck Mexico's Pacific coast as an unprecedented category 5 storm. It rapidly intensified from a tropical storm to a major hurricane in just a few hours, hitting Acapulco with winds exceeding 300 km/h and waves over 5 metres high. As the hurricane approached, the crew of the tugboat **Pemex Maya**, led by Captain Galaviz, prepared for the storm by securing their vessel in the Bay of Santa Lucia. The extreme conditions prompted the crew to navigate away from the coast and assist others in distress.

During the peak of the hurricane, the crew of the **Pemex Maya** remained vigilant, searching for survivors amidst the chaos. At 02:30 hours, they navigated towards light signals from three people in lifejackets fighting the turbulent waters and managed to rescue them carrying out complex rescue manoeuvres in darkness.

Shortly after, they rescued another survivor, who was found clinging to a piece of wood without a lifejacket. Continuing their rescue efforts, two more shipwrecked persons were spotted an hour later adrift with lifejackets. The crew had to execute again risky manoeuvres to rescue them with the help of lifebuoys. All six survivors were found to be in shock, exhausted, and suffering from bruises and scratches but fortunately without life-threatening injuries. At dawn, with the worst of the hurricane over, the **Pemex Maya** anchored in Acapulco and the survivors were later transferred for medical attention. Hurricane Otis caused extensive damage to infrastructure and numerous fatalities in Acapulco.

Certificates of Commendation

1. Captain Jérôme Noël Mougoula Saguiliba, Master of the LCT **Celeste**, nominated by Gabon, for his exceptional ship-handling expertise and determination displayed in the search and rescue operation of 150 passengers and crew members of the sunken passenger ferry **Esther Miracle**. Captain Saguiliba received a distress call and, despite being near his docking point, did not hesitate to rush to the scene to assist. In challenging weather and against a six-knot current, the **Celeste** located distress rockets and, in coordination with the Gabonese Navy, proceeded with the rescue of survivors from seven life rafts, four of them no longer buoyant, amid hazardous debris. Captain Saguiliba expertly manoeuvred his vessel to protect those shipwrecked from drifting objects and, as a result of his actions and resolve, 107 of the 123 survivors were brought to safety.
2. Lieutenant Crépin Manfoumbi Mengara, on board the rapid patrol boat **Mayumba**, Gabonese Navy, nominated by Gabon, for the exemplary leadership and persistence during the search and rescue operation of the **Esther Miracle**. On arrival at the scene, 30 minutes after the LCT **Celeste**, Captain Mengara organized and coordinated separate rescue teams to search for survivors in shark infested waters and at risk of injury by floating debris. His crew focused on those floating on the water first and, despite the challenging circumstances and distressing scenes, they managed to save the lives of 16 shipwrecked persons. The following day, Captain Mengara and his crew commenced recovery efforts, which lasted a month and involved gruelling and hazardous conditions, to ensure no one was left behind. As a result of their continued efforts, the remains of 18 casualties were eventually recovered.

Letters of Commendation

1. Captain Eduardo Mesquita Pedroso, Master of the container ship **Monte Sarmiento**, nominated by Brazil, for his leadership and decisive action during a critical fire-fighting operation. His prompt decision to activate the CO2 system in the engine-room effectively extinguished the fire, preventing further spread and ensuring the safety of all 30 persons on board. His actions not only safeguarded the crew but also protected the environment and the vessel's property.
2. Commander Yong Li of the rescue vessel **Hai Xun 06838**, Law Enforcement Unit, Changshu Maritime Safety Administration, nominated by China, for his professionalism and determination demonstrated in the rescue of the 22 crew members of the bulk chemical tanker **New Bright**, which had caught fire after its cargo hold exploded and was drifting towards a river bridge. After the incident, Cmdr. Li was hospitalized for three days due to severe inhalation of a toxic burning substance.
3. Captain Hao Yang of the rescue helicopter B-7328, Dong Hai Rescue Bureau, nominated by China, for his courage, exceptional skill and great resolve demonstrated during the challenging rescue operation of the 14 crew members of the oil tanker **Daiyou 69**, after it suffered engine failure and was drifting and moving violently amid extreme weather conditions caused by Typhoon Haikui.
4. Captain Lingqi Zhang of the rescue vessel **Donghaijiu 112**, Dong Hai Rescue Bureau, nominated by China, for his professionalism and ship-handling expertise during two consecutive rescue operations of the cargo vessels **Zhenghe 9** and **Huahai 601**, amidst high waves and gale force winds. As a result of his critical judgement and decisive actions, all 25 crew members were successfully evacuated.
5. Captain Frédérick Caurant, Sub-Lieutenant Loïc Taillardat, Warrant Officer Sébastien Richard and Warrant Officer Michaël Severino, helicopter detachment of Flotilla 32F, Lanvéoc Naval Air Base, French Navy, nominated by France, for their bravery and determination during the rescue of the bulk carrier **Guyana**, after it caught fire and was drifting and rolling in rough seas and strong winds. The crew carried out multiple helicopter trips and, despite having been injured during his deployment, the diver stayed behind to assist the survivors. They ensured that all 20 crew members were hoisted to safety.
6. Captain Brijesh Nambiar and the crew of the **INS Visakhapatnam**, Indian Navy, nominated by India, for their courage and great resolve demonstrated in joining fire-fighting efforts onboard the oil tanker **Marlin Luanda**, which was struck by an anti-ship ballistic missile while laden with highly hazardous cargo. They provided effective equipment and personnel who carried out a complex plan to extinguish the fire and seal a significant hull breach, thus preventing loss of life and a serious marine pollution incident.
7. Captain Benito A. Lucio, Master of the bulk carrier **African Turaco**, nominated by Panama, for his professionalism and exceptional ship-handling expertise demonstrated in the rescue of seven fishermen who abandoned their vessel, which was ablaze, and who had been clinging to fishing buoys for almost seven hours in rough seas. Captain Lucio skilfully navigated his vessel in darkness and raced against time to save the fishermen from certain death.

8. The crew of the patrol vessel **Lee Cheongho**, Coast Guard Station Seogwipo, Republic of Korea Coast Guard, nominated by the Republic of Korea, for their tenacity and great resolve during the rescue of 11 crew members of the sinking cargo vessel **Geumyang 6**, in gale force winds and high waves, as well as for their efforts the following day in conducting a marine pollution prevention operation to mitigate damage to the environment.
9. The crew of the patrol vessel **522**, Coast Guard Station Wando, Republic of Korea Coast Guard, nominated by the Republic of Korea, for their bravery and professionalism in rescuing 19 crew members of the oil tanker **SM Jeju LNG1**, as well as 43 passengers and 15 crew members of the passenger ferry **KS Hermes**, and for preventing a marine pollution incident, after the two vessels collided in complete darkness and were at a great risk of explosion and sinking.
10. Captain Lee Gil Un and the crew of the fishing vessel **1 SungBok**, nominated by the Republic of Korea, for their courage and great resolve demonstrated during the night rescue of nine survivors from the fishing vessel **Bobae**, which had caught fire in the engine-room, a long distance away from the nearest coastal area. The crew successfully transferred the survivors to safety before the vessel rapidly became engulfed in flames and sank.
11. Lieutenant Commander Subhasinghe Saia and the diving team of the SLNS **Vijayabahu** (P 627), Sri Lanka Navy, nominated by Sri Lanka, for their tenacity and expertise displayed in the underwater rescue operation of potentially trapped survivors among the 39 crew members of the capsized fishing vessel **Lu Peng Yuan Yu-28**. Sadly, after three days of relentless effort, no survivors were found. Facing very challenging underwater conditions caused by turbulent seas and hazardous obstacles, the team managed to recover the remains of two casualties.
12. The crew of the CGC **Alex Haley** (WMEC 39), United States Coast Guard, nominated by the United States, for their exceptional seamanship skills and team effort displayed during the heavy weather tow operation of the fishing vessel **Aleutian No.1**, which had lost propulsion and was drifting towards dangerous shoal, near an approaching cyclone. As a result of their tireless efforts over 32 hours, all eight fishermen were brought to safety.
13. BM2 Theodore Noah S. Kirkbridge, BM3 Christian V. Lorenzo, MK2 Anthony C. Mason and BM3 Kaleiopia E. Guth, Coast Guard Station Maui, United States Coast Guard, nominated by the United States, for their courage and professionalism displayed during the rescue of persons fleeing the wildfires in Lahaina, Maui. The crew skilfully navigated their way, in reduced visibility caused by towering flames, suffocating smoke and exploding vessels, to rescue 12 individuals who were trapped by the fire in the harbour area.
14. Ms. Lashawna J. Garnier, Ms. Emma C. Nelson and Ms. Christina A. Lovitt, co-Captains of the small passenger vessel **Expeditions'** dinghy, nominated by the United States, for the bravery and decisiveness they demonstrated during the rescue of persons fleeing the wildfires in Lahaina, Maui. After rescuing two people stranded in the harbour, as well as the operator of the pleasure boat **Kaulana**, the co-Captains then volunteered to join forces with the United States Coast Guard and the vessel **Trilogy II** to assist in the evacuation of over 40 people trapped by the fire along the harbour break wall.

15. BM2 Joshua A. Marzilli, Coast Guard Station Maui, United States Coast Guard, and Mr. Travis DeWater, serving as rescue swimmer on board the small passenger vessel **Trilogy II**, nominated by the United States, for their bravery and determination displayed during the rescue of persons fleeing the wildfires in Lahaina, Maui. BM2 Marzilli and Mr. DeWater, assisted by the **Expeditions'** dinghy, paddled their surfboards towards the harbour, through strong winds, breaking waves and flying embers, and directly contributed to the safety and survival of more than 40 people trapped by the fire.

In addition, the Panel of Judges decided to award the following recognitions:

Special recognition for merchant vessels and their crew involved in the rescue of mixed migrants at sea, for the crucial role everyone on board their vessels played in rescuing and assisting persons in distress at sea (information about this recognition can be found [here](#)).

1. Captain Yi Liu and the crew of the M/V **Cosco Shipping Solar**, nominated by China;
 2. Captain E.V. Tijssen and the crew of the M/V **Maersk Brownsville**, nominated by Denmark and the Netherlands;
 3. Captain Francisco Saavedra Jr. and the crew of the M/T **Kingston**, nominated by the Philippines;
 4. Captain Andreas Karlström and the crew of the M/S **Norwegian Breakaway**, nominated by CLIA;
 5. Captain Damir Rikanovic and the crew of the M/S **Scarlet Lady**, nominated by CLIA;
 6. Captain Matthew Hudson and the crew of the M/S **Valiant Lady**, nominated by CLIA;
 7. Captain Bruno Palomba and the crew of the M/S **Carnival Magic**, nominated by CLIA;
 8. Captain Nick Sunderland and the crew of the M/S **Star Legend**, nominated by CLIA;
 9. Captain David Adrian and the crew of the M/S **Wind Star**, nominated by CLIA.
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