



World Maritime Theme 2021

“Seafarers: at the core of shipping’s future”

Message by IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we begin a new year, the COVID-19 pandemic still holds sway, with many countries subject to lockdowns and travel restrictions.

The development of various vaccines offers the first gleams of hope, although for many seafarers, the situation is still desperate. Hundreds of thousands cannot leave ships; whilst many others cannot join. Abandonment of seafarers reached record levels in 2020. This humanitarian crisis threatens global trade and safe navigation.

We all must do better to support our brave professionals who continue to deliver global trade. The dedication and professionalism of more than one and a half million seafarers worldwide deserve our great admiration and gratitude – but most importantly, immediate action.

A first step would be for all countries to designate seafarers as key workers, as outlined in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution adopted in December. To date, just over 50 IMO Member States have done so.

We need more Governments to step up. Key worker designation is crucial to ensure prioritization for vaccination. Once again, I strongly urge Governments to designate seafarers as key workers.

With the development of vaccines, there is a need for further cooperation and concerted efforts to facilitate the vaccination of seafarers. IMO stands ready to work with all stakeholders on these emerging issues.

But seafarers have not only been impacted by the pandemic, their lives have also been put at risk in other ways – one major issue being piracy incidents, costing lives and traumatizing many more who have been held hostage or are still in the hands of their attackers.

We need to do more and IMO has decided to make 2021 a year of action for our seafarers.

This year's World Maritime Theme – **“Seafarers: at the core of shipping's future”** – is dedicated to the seafarers who have shown tremendous fortitude and determination in continuing to deliver global trade throughout this global crisis.

At IMO, seafarers have always been at the centre of all our work - be it in the area of safety, maritime security, or environmental protection.

However, this year, we want to shine a light on the significance of the human element to the safety of life on board ships and the importance of ensuring an appropriately trained and qualified future workforce, ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of digitalization and automation. We will also place a special focus on seafarers' well-being, an area highlighted by the plight of seafarers during the COVID-pandemic.

All these important topics need global attention. We will be hosting many events supporting the theme. Our goal to highlight seafarers as the heart of shipping throughout the year and beyond. We will unveil our programme of events soon.

We have a challenging year ahead.

Let us focus on finding solutions and preparing for the post-COVID world – a world in which sustainable shipping will play a crucial role.

I look forward to collaborating with all stakeholders to enhance the resilience and green credentials of shipping; and to putting seafarers first and foremost.

Let us all join in supporting our World Maritime Theme – “Seafarers: at the core of shipping's future”.

Thank you.
