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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
BALLAST WATER MANAGEMENT FOR
SHIPS

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Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to this Conference on Ballast Water Management for Ships. The Conference marks the culmination of many years of work by the Organization to address the issue of ballast water management since, back in 1988, Canada first reported on invasive marine species in the Great Lakes. This was followed soon afterwards by similar reports from other countries. In response, the MEPC adopted, in 1991, voluntary guidelines for preventing the introduction into the marine environment of unwanted aquatic organisms and pathogens from ships' ballast water. However, the seriousness of the matter and the need to keep the issue under continuous review did not allow the Organization to remain idle ever since.

Following the UN Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the MEPC guidelines were upgraded to an Assembly resolution that was adopted in 1993. A further milestone was reached in 1997 with the adoption of another Assembly resolution entitled "Guidelines for the control and management of ships' ballast water to minimize the transfer of harmful aquatic organisms and pathogens", which are still in force today. Since then, the Organization has been working towards the development of legally binding provisions on ballast water management including guidelines for their effective implementation and a guidance on the safety aspects of ballast water exchange at sea. In 2002, the World Summit for Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, agreed that measures to address the problem should be accelerated and, consequently, IMO was urged to finalize the draft ballast water convention the Organization was preparing at the time.

A successful outcome to this week's Conference is vitally important as our duty to protect the marine environment for this and future generations cannot be over-stated. Oceans and seas cover more than 70% of our planet. More than 60% of the world's human population lives on, or by, the coast and this figure is expected to rise to more than 75% in the next 20 years. Fisheries and aquaculture are key elements in the effort to secure present and future global food supplies. At the same time, the seas continue, regrettably, to be used as sinks for the world's wastes and marine productivity, biodiversity and basic ecological processes are under threat from, amongst other things, land- and ship-based sources of marine pollution, global climate change and, of course, invasive species.

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Global shipping, which unceremoniously moves, economically and safely, over 90% of the world's commodities, transfers enormous quantities of ballast water across the globe each year. While we recognize that ballast water is essential to the safe operation of ships, we cannot ignore that it also poses a significant environmental threat as literally thousands of microbes and marine organisms are carried globally in ships' ballast tanks. When discharged into new environments away from their natural habitat, these organisms may become invasive, severely disrupting the native ecology and seriously impacting on the economy and human health of the region of their migration. The global economic impact of invasive marine species has not been quantified yet but is thought likely to be in the order of tens of billions of US dollars a year.

Addressing a maritime conference, I see no reason to over-emphasize that shipping is truly global and multi-national, underpinning the continued economic development of human society and representing a vital force for the delivery of improved living conditions through trade and commerce. This highlights the need for us to prudently adopt a balanced approach to environmental concerns, economic considerations of world trade and, equally importantly, the safety of life on ships.

The introduction of harmful aquatic organisms and pathogens to new environments has been identified as one of the four greatest threats to the world's oceans (the other three being land sourced marine pollution, over exploitation of living marine resources and destruction of habitat). Proper control and management of ships' ballast water is therefore a major environmental challenge for IMO and the global shipping industry. The severity of the issue has prompted some nations to consider national measures to put in place quality criteria for the discharge of ballast water in areas under their jurisdiction. Although the sensitivity and motives behind such moves are understandable, I consider that, given the international nature of shipping, the only way to effectively address the identified problems should be through the adoption and wide implementation of a global legally binding instrument - which is what has brought us here together this week.

While it should be acknowledged that shipping is by no means the only route through which harmful species invade sea areas, ballast water and hull fouling are both contributors to this global problem and IMO and the shipping industry should be given due credit for having taken concerted action, with the valuable contribution of environmental organizations, to find ways to address these and other related issues. The importance of developing international standards and a uniform global approach is undeniably the only way forward. While the new ballast water Convention, which I hope you will agree by the end of the week, will certainly have impacts on the industry, these will be far less disruptive than the alternative, potentially disparate regional and unilateral responses, which would undoubtedly proliferate in the absence of an *ad hoc* IMO instrument.

Although MEPC made, to its credit, considerable progress towards agreement on the text of the draft Convention, there are still several important outstanding issues which need to be resolved by this Conference, including:

- .1 the standards for ballast water treatment;
- .2 additional measures that Parties may take as a condition to port entry and whether they should be approved by the Organization;
- .3 the grandfather clauses for existing ships;

- .4 the conditions to permit the discharge of unmanaged ballast water;
- .5 the minimum distance from the nearest land and the depth of water where ballast water exchange is to be allowed; and
- .6 the entry-into-force provisions.

When considering the latter issue, that of the entry-into-force provisions, we have to recognize the sensitivity States have about the impact on the environment, human health, property or resources of ships' ballast water and sediments if left uncontrolled. The fact that, as we are aware, several States have already taken unilateral action to prevent, minimize and ultimately eliminate the risks of introduction into the marine environment of harmful aquatic organisms and pathogens should be taken seriously into account in your deliberations on how early you would wish to see the new instrument coming into force and thus stem any trend towards proliferation of any unilateral measures.

With this in mind, you may consider adopting conditions for the entry into force of the convention such that its purpose is well served as a global instrument emerging from an international organization setting global standards.

I am sure that, by the end of the Conference, you will be able to address these and any other relevant issues, reach practical and workable solutions and come up with meaningful technical requirements. There may be difficulties along the way but I am sure that you will do your utmost to reach consensus decisions by applying the renowned IMO spirit of co-operation and thus see the Conference coming to a successful conclusion. With my colleagues in the Secretariat, we will, as always, provide whatever assistance is necessary for the success of the meeting.

Once the new Convention is adopted, it will be vital that Governments all over the world are made aware of it and the implications of its provisions so that it may be implemented widely and effectively worldwide. This could be largely undertaken by our Integrated Technical Co-operation Programme and it is for this reason that I would urge you to favourably consider agreeing the introduction in the draft Convention of an article on technical co-operation and the adoption of a relevant Conference resolution.

Because of the limited time available, it is important that you utilize it profitably and productively. The Convention we all expect to see at the end of the Conference will be a significant step towards protecting the marine environment for this and future generations. Our duty to our children and their children cannot be over-stated. I am sure we would all wish them to inherit a world with clean, productive, safe and secure seas – and the outcome of this Conference, by staving of an increasingly serious threat, will be essential to ensuring this is so.

I will therefore conclude my remarks now by, once again, extending my warmest welcome to all of you and reiterating my sincere wishes for a fruitful Conference to be added to the chain of IMO's successful endeavours to achieve its objectives.

Thank you.