E

Ref: T2/6.03

COMSAR/Circ.13
6 March 1998

SHORE-TO-SHIP COMMUNICATIONS DURING A DISTRESS

1   The Sub-Committee on Radiocommunications and Search and Rescue (COMSAR), at its third session (23 to 27 February 1998), taking into account the need for providing priority for shore originated distress communications to ships whose SESs are busy with ongoing traffic, prepared the following guidance for RCCs to facilitate shore-to-ship communications during a distress.

2   The techniques outlined below may be used by RCCs to contact ships fitted with Inmarsat Ship Earth Stations (SESs), but which are busy at the time with other traffic.

3   The provision of "immediate access for distress priority calls from a registered RCC to a ship" is complex. For example, Inmarsat ship terminals generally have only one receiver and it is, therefore, impossible to interrupt a call and connect the SES directly to an RCC by intervention from any CES.

4   If the SES is being called from an RCC via another CES from which the ongoing call has been established, then there is no option but wait until the call has cleared and the SES is idle to set up a priority call.

5   If the SES is being called by an RCC via the same CES which has the ongoing call, then the CES can clear the ongoing call and immediately set up the call from the RCC.

6   With respect to the Inmarsat-C system, if the SES is in communication with an CES, other than the calling CES, then the calling CES has no option other than wait until the SES is idle and then set up the call. If the SES is being called by an RCC via the same CES there are two options:

      .1   to clear the current call and start the distress priority call; or

      .2   to wait until the current call has completed and perform the distress priority call from the RCC as a follow-on call.

7   The second option (6.2) is preferable unless the SES is engaged in a long message (most messages last 1-2 minutes) since aborting the call and starting a new one causes the SES to go into idle mode and retune to the NCS. It is likely therefore that option 6.2 would actually be quicker except for very long messages.

8   As SOLAS ships will most likely carry an Inmarsat-C equipment as part of their GMDSS equipment it would be an option to send a Distress priority message in the shore-to-ship direction asking the ship to clear their Inmarsat voice terminal and contact the RCC immediately. This solution has been used successfully.

9   The facilities and resources available for these RCCs and the nature of the communications link between the RCC and CES are strictly a matter for the country concerned (COMSAR 3/INF.21 of Inmarsat refers).

10   Member Governments are invited to bring this guidance to the attention of telecommunication authorities, shipowners, ship operators, shipmasters, GMDSS training institutions and other interested parties.

_____