



▶ Statement of the Officers of the STC ¹ on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

The global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is creating dire circumstances for the shipping industry and seafarers. Daily life in many countries has been heavily restricted, yet societies still need their supplies of food, medicine and everyday goods, and factories require materials and logistics to ship their products. This underlines the need for robust international supply chains and emphasizes the critical importance of maritime trade to the global economy, which relies on shipping for 90 per cent of all goods.

The Officers of the Special Tripartite Committee of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended, representing Seafarers, Shipowners and Governments, **urge the International Labour Office to raise awareness among governments, including labour supplying States and port and flag State authorities**, that the goods on which we all rely in our everyday lives are transported by seafarers and that these **seafarers are just as worthy as everyone else and should be treated with dignity and respect to ensure that they can continue to provide their vital services to the world.**

In these unprecedented circumstances, it is imperative that Member States ensure that the flow of essential goods, energy, food, medicines and many other products is not disrupted by measures that impede the safe and efficient movement of ships and the seafarers who operate them. In this respect, the Officers of the STC would like to raise the following important points that need to be urgently addressed by Member States:

- ▶ Seafarers should be officially recognized as **key workers**, and be granted exemptions from any travel restrictions and special considerations to enable them to join and leave

¹ The Special Tripartite Committee (STC) is the tripartite body established under Article XIII of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, to keep the working of the Convention under continuous review. The Officers of the STC have been appointed by the ILO Governing Body for a period of three years. They are currently: Ms Julie Carlton from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Chairperson), Mr Martin Marini from Singapore (Government Vice-Chairperson), Mr David Heindel from the United States of America (Seafarer Vice-Chairperson) and Mr Max Johns from Germany (Shipowner Vice-Chairperson). In the framework of this unprecedented crisis, the ILO reached out to them to build the most appropriate responses to the challenges faced by the maritime sector.

their ships and return home without impediment, while complying with good practice in infection control.

- ▶ It is important that Member States recognize the need for a highly globalized industry like shipping, with its multinational workforce, to be able to smoothly undertake **crew changes** and **repatriation** around the world. It has been disturbing to see reports that many port States have imposed local regulations and travel and quarantine restrictions on international seafarers. Clear directions should be given to port authorities and local health authorities to enable ships to continue trading, and to enable the swift disembarkation and repatriation of crew members.
- ▶ It is imperative that Member States do all that they can to facilitate the delivery of essential **medical supplies, fuel, water, spare parts and provisions** to ships. It is disturbing that ports in some parts of the world have refused to allow some ships to enter because they had previously called at ports in areas affected by the coronavirus, which has prevented vessels from obtaining such essential supplies. It is also extremely alarming to hear reports that suppliers have been prevented from boarding ships in some parts of the world and from supplying masks, overalls and other personal protective equipment to crews. It is essential that seafarers have access to plentiful supplies and equipment, in line with the *International Medical Guide for Ships*, third edition, and the guidance provided by the International Maritime Health Association, the International Chamber of Shipping and the World Health Organization.
- ▶ In cases where seafarers' tours of duty have to be extended beyond the duration specified in their employment agreements or under national laws applying the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended a pragmatic approach is needed to enable them to remain on board for a reasonable period beyond their scheduled tours of duty.
- ▶ A similarly pragmatic approach is required to support seafarers who may face problems in undertaking training or refresher courses for certification. Flag States and port States should work with other maritime nations to extend the validity of seafarers' certificates for at least three months, or until further notice when the situation has eased.
- ▶ In recent times, there has been widespread and welcome acknowledgement of the inherent stress, isolation and social pressures that seafarers experience. COVID-19 clearly exacerbates these problems, and has an adverse impact on the mental and physical well-being of seafarers and their families. It is worrying to hear of port-based welfare services being closed or curtailed as a response to the current situation, and it is vital that full support is given to seafarer welfare services.
- ▶ It is also important to stress the need for a pragmatic approach and for special consideration in cases where ships cannot undertake vetting and inspection or receive externally provided maintenance and support as a consequence of travel restrictions affecting specialized staff, surveyors and technicians. Similarly, flexibility in ship

certification may be necessary, to respond to difficulties in meeting dry-docking intervals.

- ▶ It is vital that labour supply countries facilitate the return home of those seafarers who have completed their contracts, and allow seafarers to leave their home country to join their ships, after appropriate medical screening.
- ▶ It is crucial that port States allow ships into their ports to unload goods for the community, and that they allow seafarers to access port State medical facilities and receive medical attention on an equal basis as nationals and in accordance with national circumstances. Steps should also be taken to ensure that visitors to ships are strictly monitored and are provided with all necessary personal protective equipment to limit the risk of contagion.

Furthermore, the social partners express concern about a potential increase in cases of abandonment due to shipowners not having the financial ability to support their fleet operations. It is essential to monitor the situation and emerging trends and to have effective reporting on abandonment, as this is the only way of understanding the impact and the measures necessary to assist seafarers in view of the restrictions in place during the COVID-19 crisis.

The Officers of the STC emphasize the importance of ships and seafarers to national and global supply chains. It is essential that the points raised above are taken seriously and that clear, decisive and supportive action is taken by Member States to enable the free movement of seafarers, to facilitate shipping operations and to minimize the social, economic and operational impact of the COVID-19 outbreak upon this essential industry and, in turn, to protect the global supply of the products and produce on which we all depend.