



To: Ministers with Responsibility for Maritime Transport and Commercial Aviation

May 2020

FACILITATING SAFE SHIP CREW CHANGES AND REPATRIATION DURING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) PANDEMIC

We are writing on behalf of:

- The International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) which, via its member national shipowners' associations, represents over 80% of the world merchant fleet; and
- The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) which, via its national union affiliates, represents about two million merchant seafarers globally.

Due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, several hundred thousand seafarers have already extended their service on board commercial ships after many months at sea, unable to be replaced after long tours of duty or be repatriated via aircraft to their home countries. Shipping is vital to the maintenance of global supply chains, but the current situation is increasingly unsustainable for the safety and wellbeing of ships' crews and the safe operation of maritime traffic.

At the end of May, another 150,000 merchant seafarers will need to be changed over to and from the ships which they operate, to ensure compliance with international maritime regulations for safety of life at sea and environmental protection, crew health and welfare, and the prevention of fatigue.

We therefore wish to draw your attention to the '**Recommended Framework of Protocols for Ensuring Safe Ship Crew Changes and Travel during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic**' which have been circulated by the United Nations International Maritime Organization (IMO)¹ and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

¹ IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add14 of 5 May 2020

[http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Documents/COVID%20CL%204204%20adds/Circular%20Letter%20No.4204-Add.14%20-%20Coronavirus%20\(Covid-19\)%20-%20Recommended%20Framework%20Of%20Protocols.pdf](http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Documents/COVID%20CL%204204%20adds/Circular%20Letter%20No.4204-Add.14%20-%20Coronavirus%20(Covid-19)%20-%20Recommended%20Framework%20Of%20Protocols.pdf)

Taking account of these important recommendations, and the measures they include to manage and control the risks of infection throughout the ship crew change process, we urgently require your assistance in doing everything possible:

1. To help facilitate the movement of seafarers, via aircraft, for the purpose of conducting ship crew changes, in view of the recommended status of seafarers as 'key workers' as they provide an essential service to the global economy.
2. In particular, notwithstanding any restrictions that might continue to apply during the remainder of the pandemic, permitting airports in your country to allow flights to resume, including flights provided by airlines to help move seafarers to and from their ships for the purpose of conducting crew changes and repatriation to their home countries.

In order to help make this happen, we respectfully urge that your Government makes use of this '**Framework of Protocols for Ensuring Safe Ship Crew Changes and Travel**' and arranges to disseminate these recommendations among relevant national authorities with responsibility, *inter alia*, for maritime issues, health, customs, immigration, border control, seaport and civil aviation authorities, and to liaise with all relevant national authorities with respect to the use and implementation of this Framework.

We would also be most grateful if your transport ministries could respond to any requests to engage in discussions with those international airlines that fly from major airports under your jurisdiction about the best means of resuming flights for the purpose of facilitating ship crew changes globally, in conjunction with your national shipowners' association and national seafarers' trade unions.

Your faithfully



Guy Platten, Secretary General, ICS



Stephen Cotton, General Secretary, ITF