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INTERCARGO calls for seafarers to receive COVID-19 vaccine as a priority

Following the worldwide news that vaccines for COVID-19 are now a reality, it is paramount that authorities give priority to seafarers in their vaccination programmes, says INTERCARGO, the organisation representing the world's quality dry bulk shipowners.

“As key workers, seafarers should be included in the early stages of a nation’s vaccination programme,” says INTERCARGO Chairman Dimitris Fafalios. “As a key element in the drive to reboot the world’s economy, seafarers should receive vaccinations quickly and efficiently. We welcome new initiatives from national authorities and industry bodies to facilitate this and urge that these new initiatives be brought forward and trialled as a matter of urgency, so that seafarers can once again travel safely between their home and their ships, and undertake port operations without the fear of infection.”

INTERCARGO Vice-Chairman Captain Jay K. Pillai says “It is of grave concern that at least 3% of all seafarers currently on board ships will be spending a second Christmas at sea, away from their families and friends, and an estimated 20% of all seafarers on board are still not relieved upon completion of their regular contracts, despite flights becoming available. The world is making great strides to combat the personal and economic toll taken by this virus” and adds “It is now time for the World Health Organisation to work in the direction of a worldwide acceptable COVID vaccination certificate, both on paper and electronically, and for the unique situation our seafarers face to be recognised.”

INTERCARGO has actively supported industry initiatives, including the recent IMO Maritime Safety Committee industry-developed protocols, which set out general measures and procedures designed to ensure that ship crew changes and travel can take place safely during the pandemic. INTERCARGO welcomes the recent UN Resolution on Crew Change, which urges Member States to designate seafarers and other marine personnel as key workers

Unfortunately, the seafarers’ humanitarian crisis continues as a result of the impact of COVID-19 on crew change. Difficulties have been experienced in the practical implementation of the IMO protocols. Whilst the earlier challenges focused on the non-availability of flights, visa issuance hurdles are currently the primary obstacle. In addition, the availability of testing facilities prior to departing home country and embarkation on ship, the difficulties faced when positive COVID-19 cases have been found on board, access to medical care and medical facilities, as well as facilitating evacuation of seafarers in need of urgent medical attention, continue to be extremely challenging.

Captain Pillai adds: “Unfortunately, the seafarers on board remain under stress and at risk of mental illness, and those on leave are increasingly anxious to resume earning their livelihood. Both parties are left to the mercy of governments and their Port Authorities to facilitate crew change. While we applaud the positive steps taken by some governments to allow the gradual opening of ports to crew change, this process has not been smooth and continues to be full of setbacks.”

“It is high time for ports and charterers to recognise seafarers as fellow human beings and extend compassion towards those who carry and care for their cargoes.”

INTERCARGO is a proud supporter of the [#SeafarersDeliveringChristmas](#) joint industry campaign to show its gratitude to all seafarers and especially those who are away from their loved ones.

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About INTERCARGO: International shipping is vital for the global economy and prosperity as it transports approximately 90% of world trade. The dry bulk sector is the largest shipping sector in terms of number of ships and deadweight. Dry bulk carriers account for 43% of the world fleet (in tonnage) and carry an estimated 55% of the global transport work (in ton-miles). You are invited to view our video [Dry Bulk Shipping: Sustainably serving the world's essential needs](#).

The International Association of Dry Cargo Shipowners (INTERCARGO) is representing the interests of quality dry bulk shipowners, with close to 2,400 registered ships out of more than 11,000 ships in the global dry bulk fleet, corresponding to over 25% of the global dry bulk fleet basis deadweight. INTERCARGO convened for the first time in 1980 in London and has been participating with consultative status at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) since 1993. INTERCARGO provides the forum where dry bulk shipowners, managers and operators are informed about, discuss and share concerns on key topics and regulatory challenges, especially in relation to safety, the environment and operational excellence. The Association takes forward its Members' positions to IMO, as well as to other shipping and international industry fora, having free and fair competition as a principle.