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Circular Letter No.4204/Add.14  
5 May 2020

To: All IMO Member States  
United Nations and specialized agencies  
Intergovernmental organizations  
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO

Subject: **Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Recommended framework of protocols for ensuring safe ship crew changes and travel during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic**

The Secretary-General is aware of the significant challenges being faced by the global shipping industry to effect crew changes as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. Due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, large numbers of seafarers are having to extend their service on board 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 unsustainable for the safety and wellbeing of ship crew and the safe operation of maritime trade. Each month about 150,000 seafarers need to be changed over to and from the ships which they operate to ensure compliance with international maritime regulations for ensuring safety, crew health and welfare, and the prevention of fatigue.

The Secretary-General refers to IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.6 of 27 March 2020 which contains, inter alia, recommendations to Member States about measures to facilitate ship crew changes in seaports during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Expanding on these recommendations, the Secretary-General has received a *Recommended framework of protocols for ensuring safe ship crew changes and travel during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic*, proposed by a broad cross section of global industry associations in consultative status with the Organization representing the maritime transportation sector, as follows: ICS, IAPH, BIMCO, IFSMA, INTERTANKO, P&I Clubs, CLIA, INTERCARGO, InterManager, IPTA, IMCA, INTERFERRY, FONASBA, ITF and WSC; and which also take account of input from the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

The Secretary-General supports these protocols and urges their implementation. Member States and international organizations are invited to make use of the annexed Framework and to disseminate it 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 relevant national authorities with respect to the use and implementation of this Framework, as appropriate.

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## **ANNEX**

### **WORLD MARITIME DAY 2020 SUSTAINABLE SHIPPING FOR A SUSTAINABLE PLANET**

#### **A message from Kitack Lim Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization**

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all of us, with unprecedented impacts on our lives, our economies and our societies. At IMO we have observed and attempted to address the impacts on the shipping industry and especially seafarers. In these challenging times, the ability of shipping services and seafarers to deliver essential goods, including medical supplies, food and fuel is central to responding to, and overcoming this crisis.

The pandemic has shown that shipping, the most reliable, efficient and cost-effective method of international transportation that carries more than 80% of global trade, remains the leading facilitator of the global economy. Therefore, shipping and maritime will be at the heart of the economic recovery and future sustainable growth far into the future, both at sea and ashore, supporting an inclusive and resilient economy to underpin the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

"Sustainable shipping for a sustainable planet", our theme for 2020 couldn't be more relevant now and for years to come.

In the post-COVID world, much focus will be directed at the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by all UN Member States in 2015.

These goals are as relevant as ever, and shipping is essential for sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda will only be realized with a sustainable transport sector supporting world trade and facilitating the global economy.

But shipping also needs to secure its own sustainability. Shipping activities must be balanced with safety of life at sea and the long-term health and diversity of the oceans. A major part of IMO's role is to ensure that shipping continues to make its contribution to the global economy without upsetting nature's delicate balance.

Supported by IMO's regulatory framework, shipping is engaged on a journey of transformation towards this sustainable future.

IMO's actions are:

- enhance maritime safety and digital shipping;
- ensure and enhance the professionalism, competence and workplace environment of the world's seafarers;
- decarbonization of international shipping and reduction of sulphur in ships' fuel oil;
- protect the polar regions and reduce marine litter;
- facilitation of maritime traffic in collaboration with port industry;

- technical cooperation and capacity-building of developing countries;
- enhance gender equality in the maritime community; and
- maintain a robust response system to meet threats to safety and security at sea, and protect the marine environment.

All form the foundation for shipping's part in securing a sustainable future for all of us. We must now look to see what more should be done to achieve these goals.

At the start of 2020, alongside our UN sister entities, we marked the beginning of a decade of action and delivery for the SDGs. In choosing "Sustainable Shipping for a Sustainable Planet" as this year's World Maritime Theme, we focus global attention on how IMO, the Organization's Member States, civil society and the shipping industry are working together to ensure that shipping continues and strengthens its contribution towards sustainable growth.

As the global pandemic has turned all our lives upside down, I have been encouraged by the unprecedented level of cooperation and collaboration in the maritime world. I have spoken many times of our "voyage together", encompassing Member States, NGOS and multiple maritime stakeholders. Though this year, the spirit of those words has been more important than ever. We need to capitalize on this willingness to work together as we move forward, supporting shipping, seafarers and the maritime sector to fulfil their responsibilities.

Thank you.

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United Nations

SECRETARY GENERAL  
**PRÉSS RELEASE**

SG/SM/20274  
23 SEPTEMBER 2020

**Secretary-General Highlights Seafarers' Essential Role in Supply Chain, Calls for Enhanced Sustainability, on World Maritime Day**

Following is UN Secretary-General António Guterres' message for World Maritime Day, observed on 24 September:

The theme of this year's World Maritime Day — sustainable shipping for a sustainable planet — has gained extraordinary resonance as shipping has continued to transport more than 80 per cent of world trade, including vital medical supplies, food and other basic goods that are critical for the COVID-19 response and recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the professionalism and sacrifice of the 2 million seafarers who serve on the world's merchant fleet.

I remain very concerned about the growing humanitarian and safety crisis facing hundreds of thousands of these indispensable workers. Despite the unprecedented conditions brought about by the pandemic, seafarers have continued to tirelessly support the often-invisible global logistics chain. Physically and mentally exhausted, away from their families and loved ones, their time at sea has now been extended far beyond the standards stipulated in international conventions, with some tours of duty now stretching more than 17 months. Fatigued seafarers cannot operate indefinitely, and disruptions to international shipping would have devastating consequences.

I renew my appeal to Governments to address their plight by formally designating seafarers and other marine personnel as “key workers”, ensuring safe crew changes and implementing the protocols developed by United Nations agencies, as well as the International Chamber of Shipping and the International Transport Workers' Federation, allowing stranded seafarers to be repatriated and others to join ships.

In the longer term, a sustainable shipping industry is vital. Shipping will play a central role in achieving most, if not all, of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. But, shipping activities must be balanced with the long-term health and biodiversity of the oceans. The United Nations International Maritime Organization (IMO) has developed global standards which support cleaner and greener

shipping. Governments and IMO must continue to work together to support the decarbonization of shipping and improved energy efficiency; the facilitation of shipping through increased digitalization, involving ports; and efforts to ensure the sustainability and protection of the workforce, including a focus on diversity.

Shipping can and must continue to make its contribution to the global economy without upsetting nature's delicate balance. The maritime sector underpins world trade and will continue to be essential for building a sustainable future for people and planet.

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