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IMEC Annual General Meeting charts course for the way ahead

The Annual General Meeting of IMEC (The International Maritime Employers' Committee) took place today, 25 March 2009 in London, following on from an IMEC Executive Committee meeting which was held on 24 March.

The Annual General Meeting brought together a significant gathering of the IMEC membership, which is made up of over 130 maritime employer representatives from all over the world. The discussions during the meeting were wide ranging, covering a number of topics which included debate on the current financial crisis that is heavily affecting world shipping. This topic was of particular relevance given that the IBF (International Bargaining Forum) will be meeting during this year to discuss the terms and conditions for seafarers sailing aboard members' ships. Many of the members voiced concerns that in the current financial climate, they would not be able to support discussions at the IBF that could lead to any increased costs in their sea-staff personnel budgets, indeed they were under severe pressure to substantially reduce these costs.

The IMEC General Assembly was also updated on the status of the various training initiatives that are being undertaken, in particular the expansion of the IMEC Cadet programme in the Philippines. This programme is increasing during 2009 to allow for a further 50 Cadets to be taken on under full sponsorship at the University of Cebu and, for the first time, 150 Cadets at the Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific in a campus for IMEC's sole use. The training programmes will be administered by IMEC's dedicated

Manila training office. Other key projects that IMEC members were updated on included the provision of free English language training in Novorossiysk and the provision of funding to convert ratings to officers to support the need for future manpower.

During the meeting members had the opportunity to raise topics that were of particular concern such as the continued threat of piracy in the Gulf of Aden and discuss the IMEC response to such issues. On this particular subject, members voiced their agreement that since the adoption of the new transit corridors within the Gulf area and also due to the increased presence of Naval forces in the area, it appeared that the frequency of successful pirate attacks was dropping, although ships transiting the area still needed to maintain extra vigilance during their passage. During the meeting the Chairman confirmed that IMEC had invited a number of National Shipowner Associations to a meeting during April in London, with a view to coordinating the response of Shipowner Associations to the current and future issues developing from the threat of piracy to merchant vessels.

The Chairman reported on the maintained strength of IMEC membership, with four new applications for membership having been received from the start of 2009. In light of this sustained membership and following on from the support of the members after the previous General Assembly, that took place in November 2008 in Hong Kong, a third Vice Chairman was elected as an Officer of IMEC. Rajesh Tandon will join the Executive Officer team with immediate effect. Mr Tandon, who has responsibility for crew matters at V ships in India, will provide welcome expertise to the organisation from the Indian sub-continent. Members also voted unanimously for the re-election of Ian Sherwood, from Delta Marine, as Chairman and Bob Goodall, from Bernard Schulte (IOM), as Vice Chairman for a further two years. Greg Triantafillou, from Epsilon Hellas, who is half way through his current term as Vice Chairman, makes up the Officer team of four.

Before conclusion of the Annual General Meeting, the Chairman took the opportunity to report on the case of Capt Mangouras, who was arrested after battling for days to save the 81,000 dwt tanker Prestige after it broke apart and sank off the coast of Spain in 2002. The Members were reminded that he spent 83 days in prison and was only released on payment of bail amounting to Euro3m.

Despite appeals at the European Court for Human Rights with regards to the excessive sum required for bail and the length of time for which Captain Mangouras was imprisoned, the ECHR upheld the decision of the Spanish Courts. After consideration by the Members, it was agreed that IMEC should add its voice to other industry bodies in supporting an appeal against this decision, as it is believed that the case against Captain Mangouras was influenced heavily by the consequences of the incident rather than by the actual facts and his professional conduct.

Speaking after the meeting, Ian Sherwood the IMEC Chairman said:

“Yet again, the opportunity to bring together a significant group of IMEC members to meet at our Annual General Assembly has proved a resounding

success. I am very conscious that IMEC's policy is driven by our members and the opportunity to have open and frank discussion about the direction in which we are taking IMEC is invaluable."

Mr Sherwood went on to say:

"The entire maritime industry is facing enormous challenges as a result of the current world financial situation; it is important that we hear and understand the pressures facing every one of our members and ensure that our policies and aims are adjusted by consensus to take account of individual concerns. This I believe we have achieved very successfully during the course of our meetings."

Editors' note

The International Maritime Employers' Committee (IMEC) is an employers' organisation based in London. IMEC represents over 120 companies located all over the world that operate almost 6,500 ships and employ over 157,000 seafarers of all nationalities. The members are individual shipping companies, both owners and managers, large and small, operating all types of ships, including dry bulk, container, cruise liners, livestock carriers, reefers and tankers. The ships they operate are registered in more than 40 different countries.

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