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For immediate release

22 October 2007

IMEC Members React To Global Skills Shortage

At the meeting of the IMEC General Assembly in London on 17 October 2007, members confirmed that the organisation should press ahead with ambitious plans to launch a series of recruitment and training initiatives in the major labour supply countries next year. They also agreed to appoint a training manager, based in Manila, to ensure that the projects were managed effectively, delivered on time and to the high standards that IMEC require.

The meeting also confirmed acceptance of the outcome of the IBF wage negotiations that were concluded on 27 September. Some questions were raised about the acceptance by IMEC, as part of the IBF settlement, of a fund to be established to help encourage employment opportunities for unemployed ratings from developed economy countries. But the concessions made by ITF in respect of certain policy issues affecting IMEC members and other ship operators in response to the creation of the developed economy ratings fund were regarded as beneficial.

Initial reports of the first of a series of negotiations that would be held in the major labour supply countries over the coming months to implement the agreed IBF wage increase were also welcomed. It was agreed that the flexibility in deciding the manner in which the centrally agreed increase could be allocated at local level in discussion with the relevant ITF affiliates had been generally beneficial to seafarers and to employers.

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

“The last six months of IBF negotiations has been extremely difficult for both sides. We have had to deal with some critical and sensitive issues and try to find compromises that would allow each side to agree to move forward rather

than to back away and run the risk of breaking up a system that both sides value.

The discussion today within IMEC confirm that the overall package agreed by the IBF, despite the obvious downsides, provides a number of incentives and advantages to employers that we could not otherwise have obtained. This provides the proof that negotiations between the two sides can work to the benefit of both.”

On the recruitment and training front, IMEC members re-confirmed their commitment to institute a series of new training initiatives including:

- English language training in Eastern Europe
- Rating to officer conversion courses in several countries including the Philippines and Russia
- The initiation in June 2008 of dedicated IMEC training courses for cadets in the Philippines to standards set by, and funded by, IMEC
- Sending IMEC delegations to countries that might be potential new labour sources to investigate what was needed to upgrade training standards, to see whether IMEC initiatives in other countries on dedicated training facilities or English language training might help the situation and to consider possible funding of these initiatives.

The IMEC Chairman, Ian Sherwood said:

“IMEC has become a major player in the shipping community and we must join others such as the Norwegian and Netherlands Shipowners Associations, in investing in maritime training – in a structured way and not just as a group of individual companies doing their own thing. We must make sure that the number of trainees and the quality of their training is to a standard that today's shipping industry requires.

To make sure that we have the resources to undertake these initiatives, IMEC will recruit within the next two months, a training manager to be based in the Philippines. In addition, during the forthcoming local negotiations in the main labour supply countries, it will be a priority for our negotiators to make sure that adequate funds are provided to support the training initiatives we propose.”

End