



Mr Giuseppe CONTE
Palazzo Chigi
Piazza Colonna 370
00187 Roma
Italy

Brussels, 20.07.2020

To: Mr Giuseppe CONTE, President of the Council of Ministers of Italy

Subject: Crew changes in Covid-19 times – Save our Seafarers, call for action

Dear Mr Conte,

We, the European and International social partners for maritime transport together with our maritime partners, would like to call upon you to show political leadership and commitment to the welfare of seafarers.

We appreciate the efforts of the Italian authorities, but still more needs to be done to relieve seafarers and facilitate crew changes. These are currently only taking place at an estimated level of 30% of what is needed. Seafarers are playing an essential role in maintaining the global flow of energy, food, medicines and medical supplies by ship. Many seafarers have been away from home for months, unable to leave their ships and return home because of travel restrictions imposed by governments. Meanwhile seafarers who have been rostered to replace them are being prevented from doing so by, amongst other things, the absence of facilities for obtaining visas to travel to the places where they are scheduled to join their ships – including the Schengen area.

At least 200,000 and up to 300,000 seafarers worldwide currently need to be relieved and this number rises with every week that passes. Some of these seafarers have now spent 15 months or more continuously on board. An equal number of fresh crewmembers must travel to join ships if their long-serving colleagues are to be relieved.

First and foremost this is a humanitarian crisis that must be solved in order to protect seafarers that have been on ships for far too long. But the urgent need to solve this crisis also extends ashore. Without seafarers, ships cannot operate and cannot deliver goods necessary for every part of our economy. At a time of considerable stress for global and national economies, any interruption to the flow of trade could have devastating consequences for the recovery phase.

All Italian stakeholders, in particular the Italian Shipowners' Association (CONFITARMA), have been working constantly over the past months to enable crew changes to happen and have called on the Italian Government to urgently adopt measures to facilitate this process. Regrettably these requests have so far gone largely unanswered.

Guidance on measures to be taken by operators and authorities so that seafarers are designated 'key' workers and their travel facilitated have been incorporated in IMO protocols. Similarly, the European Commission has issued guidance over recent months and is coordinating operationally with Commission services, EU Member States and international organisations.

The current situation now merits attention at the highest political level and we ask for your support in ensuring this. We are calling on your government to sign and implement the commitments made in the ministerial statement of the International Maritime Summit on Crew Changes, held on 9 July 2020 by the UK government, and in particular:

- designate all seafarers, regardless of nationality, as "key workers" and facilitate their movement under conditions that safeguard their health and minimize the risks of COVID-19 infection.
- ensure that seafarers are able to join and leave their ships for repatriation, crew changes, shore leave and medical attention without impediment.
- introduce temporary measures, including the possibility of waivers, exemptions or other relaxations from any visa or documentary requirements that might normally apply to seafarers.
- create the necessary conditions for seafarer air corridors from the EU Member States and key labour supply countries.

These commitments have been subscribed to so far by 13 countries, among which are the United Kingdom, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, and Norway. These countries have expressed their deep concern about the current situation and acknowledged that "*the inability of ship operators worldwide to conduct ship's crew changes is the single most pressing maritime operational challenge to the safe and efficient movement of global trade*".

It is time now for the immediate involvement of all the heads of Member States to avoid a humanitarian and global trade crisis. Italy plays a key role in the global supply chain, with its central position and its important ports and airports in the Mediterranean. Moreover, as an IMO Council member, we respectfully request you to ensure Italy leads by example by adopting the ministerial statements' pledges nationally and steps up its own efforts.

There are still remaining obstacles in place for crew changes to be carried out in or via Italy. Third country seafarers need to be able to obtain Schengen visas more easily so that they may travel to join ships in European ports. In this regard it is vital that:

- Italy issues visas on arrival at the airport to arriving crew members that are due to join any foreign flagged vessel in an Italian port or to crew that will be transiting through Italy to join a vessel in another EU Member State.

- authorises and provides temporary visa waivers for crew signing-on or signing-off vessels in order to deal with the influx of visa requests due over the coming months. While we understand that Italian embassies are gradually returning to normal operations and so far have been very constructive in dealing with visa applications, this will not suffice to deal with the estimated rise in demand for visas of around 2.5 times – 3 times the normal volume per month in the next few months. Such a visa waiver will be an important measure in facilitating and speeding up preparations for departures from third countries.

We trust you will use your position to make a difference in practice both through concrete measures in Italy and by using your diplomatic influence to raise this matter at the highest level in meetings both with EU Member States and with governments around the world. This will be extremely important to ensure that the hundreds of thousands of seafarers still waiting for crew changes can be relieved without any further delay.

On behalf of all the signatories of this letter your office will be contacted in order to set up a meeting with you, to discuss this urgent topic and how the actions can be facilitated further.

Yours respectfully,



Claes Berglund
President ECSA



Frank Moreels
President ETF



Guy Platten
Secretary General ICS



Stephen Cotton
Secretary General ITF



Tom Boardley
Secretary General
CLIA Europe



John W. Butler
President and CEO
World Shipping Council



Francesco Gargiulo
CEO
IMEC



Capt. Kuba Szymanski
Secretary General
INTERMANAGER



Katharina Stanzel
Managing Director
INTERTANKO



Kostas Gkonis
Secretary General
INTERCARGO



Janet Strode
General Manager
IPTA



David Loosley
Secretary General & CEO
BIMCO



Mr. Yuichi Sonoda
Secretary General
ASA

Annex: Joint Ministerial Statement of the International Maritime Virtual Summit
on Crew Changes, Thursday 9 July 2020

Copied to: Prime Minister Diplomatic Councillor, Mr Piero Benassi
Minister of Health, Mr Roberto Speranza
Minister of Infrastructure and Transport, Mrs Paola De Micheli
Minister of Internal Affairs, Mrs Luciana Lamorgese