



Dr Robert Abela,
Prime Minister of Malta
Auberge de Castille
Valletta VLT 1061

Brussels, 20 August 2020

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

Prime Minister

We, the European and international social partners for maritime transport together with our maritime partners, would like to thank you for the efforts Malta is making to facilitate crew changes. However, we urgently call for more to be done as globally only 30% of the needed crew changes are currently taking place.

Over a quarter of a million seafarers 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 are awaiting to join ships.

This is a humanitarian crisis that must be solved in order to protect seafarers that have been on ships for far too long. Further delays risk consequences to the safety and health of seafarers, the safety of ship operations and the functioning of the global waterborne supply chains. Any interruption to the flow of trade could have devastating consequences also for the recovery phase.

All stakeholders in the industry, as well as IMO, ILO and the European Commission, have been working ceaselessly over the past months to enable crew changes. We consider it is now time for the immediate and direct involvement of the Heads of Governments for concrete action to be undertaken. We are therefore writing to EU Member States at the highest political level in a call for urgent action nationally and in partnership with other countries.

Malta is an important maritime nation that relies heavily on shipping for its national survival and prosperity. Its geographical location midway between Europe, the Middle East and North Africa makes it critically important. Moreover, its ports are an important transshipment hub and a significant percentage of the world's shipping fleet is today controlled from Malta, making it an important flag State and IMO Member State.

We, therefore, respectfully request Malta to adhere to the annexed ministerial statement concluded at the International Maritime Summit on Crew Changes, hosted by the United Kingdom on 9 July 2020 and to implement its key commitments.

We particularly call on Malta to ensure crew changes are able to take place safely in its ports by urgently implementing the IMO's protocols for crew changes (No.4204/Add.6) and designating all seafarers and marine personnel, regardless of nationality, as "key workers" providing an essential service. As key workers they should be exempted from travel restrictions to be able to join and leave their ships for repatriation, crew changes, shore leave and medical attention while safeguarding health and safety. This would also ensure implementation of the European Commission's guidance and the Council's recommendations on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU (2020/912). Acknowledging that the implementation of such protocols require cooperation of various ministries, we therefore call on you, Prime Minister, to ensure the protocols are implemented without further delay.

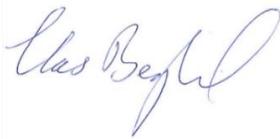
The smooth facilitation of crew changes in Europe is also still prevented by difficulties faced by seafarers to obtain Schengen visas. In view of the backlog of crew changes, a two-threefold increase in demand for visas per month is expected over the coming weeks. We are therefore calling upon EU Member States to apply all the flexibilities allowed under EU legislation including introducing temporary visa waivers for crew changes through their Member State. We commend Malta for already making use of the flexibility allowed by Regulation 2018/1806 and call on your government to use its experience and position as important flag and port State to call on other EU Schengen States to introduce such a waiver. Given the territorial limitation of such waiver to the State granting it, we also call for cooperation between Member States to temporarily allow for a Schengen visa free transit area for seafarers. We call on Malta to spearhead such a cooperation agreement since a visa free transit area will be an effective contribution by EU to substantially facilitating crew changes.

The limited availability of flight connections is another major impediment for crew changes in/through EU. We therefore call on Malta to help create, in consultation with the aviation industry and other EU Member States, the necessary conditions for seafarer air corridors between the EU and key labour supply countries so as to increase access, as soon as possible, to commercial flights to and from the principal countries of origin of seafarers. In view of the difficulties in aligning the limited flights options with embarkation and disembarkation times, we also request that Malta allows seafarers to stay in the country for at least to 10 days for the purposes of on-signing and repatriating albeit restricting seafarer movement.

In your position you can make a difference in practice as important flag and port state: through concrete measures at national level, as well as by showing political leadership in raising this matter at the highest level in meetings with other governments. This will be extremely important to ensure seafarers can be relieved without any further delay and their rights upheld.

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

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



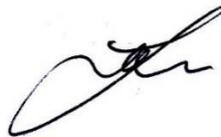
Janet Strode
General Manager
IPTA



David Loosley
Secretary General & CEO
BIMCO



Mr. Yuichi Sonoda
Secretary General
ASA



Jonathan C. Williams FICS
General Manager
FONASBA



Margaret Fitzgerald
Head of Policy & Regulatory
Affairs
IMCA

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

Copied to: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Health, Dr Chris Fearne
Minister for Foreign Affairs and EU Affairs, Mr Evarist Bartolo
Minister for Education and Employment, Dr Owen Bonnici
Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Capital Projects, Dr Ian Borg
Minister for Home Affairs, Dr Byron Camilleri

ANNEX

Joint Ministerial Statement of the International Maritime Virtual Summit on Crew Changes

Thursday 9 July 2020¹

1. Our collective efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated the critical need to prioritize the continued functioning of global supply chains to ensure the resilience of our national economies, and the importance of facilitating the safe and efficient operation of the maritime transportation system which moves over 80% of global trade.
2. Critical to this endeavour is the ability of shipping companies to continue conducting crew changes throughout the world, notwithstanding the restrictions applied by many national authorities in response to the pandemic.
3. We, as the representatives of governments, attending the International Maritime Summit on Crew Changes held on 9 July 2020 by the government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, are deeply concerned by the global crisis. Specifically, those created by ongoing obstacles affecting ship's crew changes, the impact on the well-being of seafarers and the impact that any failure by governments to resolve these issues will have on maritime transport, which must be permitted to continue to operate safely and efficiently throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Specifically, we acknowledge, as a matter of urgent concern:
 - 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;
 - At least 200,000 seafarers are estimated to require immediate repatriation, with many serving on extended crew contracts who are overdue to return home, in addition to a similar number of seafarers that urgently need to join their ships in order to allow the world's internationally trading vessels to continue to operate safely;
 - Seafarers' tours of duty cannot continue to be extended and need to be kept to a duration of less than 12 months, as set out by the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, as amended (MLC, 2006). The global shipping industry estimates that, since March 2020, only about 25% of normal crew changes have taken place. Apart from the humanitarian and crew welfare concerns, and issues of regulatory compliance, there is an increasing risk that fatigue and mental health issues could lead to serious maritime accidents;
 - The complexity of facilitating ship's crew changes, regardless of the seafarers' nationality, requires concerted action as well as access to commercial flights to the principal seafarer countries of origin and those countries where crew changes take place;
 - That the health and well-being of seafarers is paramount and is inextricably linked to the continuing safety and efficiency of ship operations.

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-of-the-international-maritime-virtual-summit-on-crew-changes>.

- That the uncertainty around a possible second wave of the Covid 19, impose swift actions without further delay to allow crew changes, to avoid further and unimaginable consequences to the already fragile global supply chain, that rely on goods transported by ships
 - That the lessons learned during the Covid 19 outbreak, assist to create international protocols in partnership with the maritime industry and the regulatory agencies, to provide practical instruments to facilitate shipping operations and seafarers to perform their essential role, in case of a recurrence of a global pandemic.
5. We therefore recognise the importance of the pledges set out below and, as a matter of urgency, to:
- (a) ENCOURAGE all IMO states to designate seafarers as "key workers" providing an essential service, to facilitate safe and unhindered movement for embarking or disembarking a vessel;
 - (b) CONSIDER the legal possibilities for accepting internationally recognised documentation, such as International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers certificate, the International Labour Organization Seafarers' Identity Document (ILO 185) and a letter by the seafarers' company, carried by seafarers as evidence of their status as key workers, and purpose of their travel and movement for crew changes;
 - (c) ENGAGE, nationally, multilaterally and bilaterally, in discussions about implementation, to the maximum extent possible, as appropriate to the circumstances that may prevail nationally or locally, of the Recommended Framework of Protocols for Ensuring Safe Ship Crew Changes and Travel during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic, circulated to IMO Member States as [Circular Letter No.4204/Add.14](#) on 5 May 2020;
 - (d) REVIEW, working in conjunction with our health, immigration and other relevant ministries, agencies and authorities, the necessity of any restrictions that may continue to apply, at national and/or local level, to the movement and travel of seafarers for the purpose of conducting ships' crew changes. This includes the possibility of allowing exemptions from quarantine or similar restrictions in accordance with relevant international rules, health regulatory guidelines as adopted by competent organisations and Industry such as the World Health Organisation, and the ability for ship owners to accommodate seafarers in hotels or designated shelters, should the quarantine be a national requirement, without delaying the ship's operations, once the crew change has taken place.
 - (e) CONSIDER, in liaison with our relevant ministries and authorities, including those responsible for immigration, temporary measures including (where possible under relevant law) the possibility of waivers, exemptions or other relaxations from any visa or documentary requirements that might normally apply to seafarers; and
 - (f) EXPLORE, in cooperation with ICAO and the aviation industry, ways of increasing access, as soon as possible, to commercial flights to and from the principal countries of origin of seafarers and the airports in reasonable proximity to those seaports where crew changes are effected and:
 - (g) URGE all IMO Members to take any necessary measures, within their area of jurisdiction, to ensure seafarers affected by the Covid-19 pandemic enjoy safe crew changes as well as repatriation to their home countries or to their place of ordinary residence.

6. We express our deepest appreciation to the world’s seafarers who have continued tirelessly to operate ships and move trade throughout this global crisis, and pledge to take forward these actions at this Summit with the urgency and resolve needed by the situation.

7. Together, we can avert the global crisis that is unfolding at sea and play our part in helping the world defeat the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Government
United Kingdom
Australia
Denmark
France
Germany
Greece
Indonesia
Netherlands
Norway
Philippines
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
South Africa
United Arab Emirates
United States of America

The International Maritime Summit on Crew Changes was also attended by United Nations officials from the International Maritime Organization (Secretary-General Kitack Lim) and International Labour Organization (Ms. Corinne Vargha), and shipping industry representatives from the International Chamber of Shipping (Mr. Guy Platten), International Transport Workers’ Federation (Mr. Stephen Cotton), UK Chamber of Shipping (Mr. Bob Sanguinetti), Nautilus International (Mark Dickinson) and Maritime UK (Harry Theochari).