



The Prime Minister's Office  
10 Downing Street  
Westminster, London  
SW1A 2AA  
United Kingdom

Brussels, 31.07.2020

To: The Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

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

Dear Prime Minister,

Seafarers are playing an essential role in maintaining the global flow of energy, food, medicines and medical supplies by ship. Yet 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.

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. Crew changes are currently happening at an estimated 30% of what is needed.

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, we are concerned that any interruption to the flow of trade could have devastating consequences for the recovery phase.

We, the European and International social partners for maritime transport together with our maritime partners, acknowledge that all stakeholders in the industry have been working constantly over the past months to enable crew changes to happen. Guidance on measures to be taken by operators and other 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 the past months and is coordinating operationally with Commission services, EU Member States and international organisations.

We, would like to thank you for the efforts the UK is making to facilitate crew changes, including in designating them as having key worker status, and for being a frontrunner in diplomatic efforts towards other countries. In particular, the UK initiative to organise the International Maritime Summit on Crew Changes, held on 9 July 2020, including the ministerial statement, have been very helpful.

We consider the resulting ministerial statement was an important milestone which however now requires broader adherence and urgent implementation. This also requires support by governments more generally as decisions and measures may need to be taken by other ministries. We are therefore writing to Heads of State to seek their urgent support and action. We call on the UK to also seek its important initiative is duly followed up.

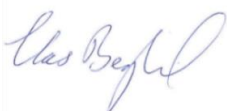
The UK is an important maritime nation, has one of the largest interests in providing international shipping services, as well as is an IMO Council Member. We, therefore, respectfully request that the UK continues to lead by example and increases its efforts to bring about an end to this growing problem. Since there are still remaining obstacles in place for crew changes to be carried out in or through the UK, we call on you to take the necessary urgent measures to follow-up and implement the key commitments in the 9 July ministerial statement at a national level.

We respectfully ask in particular for temporary visa waivers for seafarers transiting the UK. We understand that the UK Border Force is, in practice, waiving the normal visa requirement of on- and off-signing crew members in the UK and those arriving in the UK to take connecting flights. Such a visa waiver is indeed an important measure in facilitating crew changes. An official statement from the UK confirming this, would provide welcome reassurance for the industry and its workforce and serve as a good example for other countries to follow. Moreover sufficient facilities for obtaining visas either in the seafarers' countries of origin or at the border is also key for the smooth facilitation of crew changes in the UK.

We trust you will use your position to make a difference in practice both through concrete measures in the UK and by continue to use your important diplomatic influence to raise this matter now at the Heads of State level in meetings with governments around the world. This will be extremely important to ensure seafarers 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  
INTERTANCO



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: Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport, Ms Kelly Tolhurst MP

Secretary of State for the Home Department, Rt Hon Priti Patel MP

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP

## ANNEX

### **Joint Ministerial Statement of the International Maritime Virtual Summit on Crew Changes Thursday 9 July 2020<sup>1</sup>**

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

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

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.
- 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).

<b>Government</b>
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).*