



Mr. António Costa,  
Prime Minister of Portugal  
Rua da Imprensa, no. 2 – Estrela  
1250 – 126 Lisboa  
Portugal

Brussels, 13.08.2020

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

Dear 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 Portugal is making to facilitate crew changes. We however call for more to be done to relieve seafarers and facilitate crew changes, which are currently happening at a rate of only 30% of what is needed.

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

We acknowledge that 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 to happen. While we welcome all these actions, we consider it is now time for the immediate involvement of the Heads of States and Governments. We are therefore writing to EU Member States at the highest political level in order to call for urgent action nationally and in partnership with other countries.

Portugal is well placed to make a difference given its importance for international seaborne trade and in its role in the current trio of Council Presidencies of the EU as future Presidency. It is also home to important ports and airports in the EU. Its geographical location makes it of critical importance for vessels operating in much of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Portugal is also an important hub for flights from South America and Africa to other parts of the world. We, therefore, respectfully

request Portugal to lead by example by increasing its efforts to bring about an end to this growing problem. We ask that Portugal adheres to the annexed ministerial statement concluded at the International Maritime Summit on Crew Changes, hosted by the UK on 9 July 2020, and takes the necessary measures to urgently implement its key commitments.

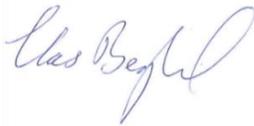
The smooth facilitation of crew changes in the EU, including in or through Portugal, is still being prevented by, amongst others, the difficulties of seafarers in obtaining Schengen visas. We, therefore, request that in particular the following actions are undertaken urgently:

- Visa Waiver: introduce temporary visa waivers allowing visa-free entry and transit through Portugal in both directions for the purposes of crew changes. EU Regulation 2018/1806 allows for such a waiver to be implemented nationally for seafarers holding a seafarer's identity document issued in accordance with the ILO Conventions No 108 or No 185 or the IMO Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic. Given the territorial limitation of such a waiver we also respectfully encourage you to show political leadership by seeking a cooperation agreement amongst Schengen countries. A visa-free transit area for seafarers in the EU will be an effective contribution by EU to substantially facilitating crew changes. It is important since the limited flight connections require last minute arrangements. Moreover, the current practice of issuing visas at EU missions in third countries or on arrival in sea/ airports, will clearly not cope with the forecasted two-threefold increase in demand for visas per month in the next weeks, in view of the backlog of crew changes.
- As long as a temporary visa free transit for seafarers is not implemented:
  - increase the visa processing capacity in Portuguese embassies in all labour supplying states and at the border points in air/seaports and prioritise visas for seafarers.
  - issue visas on arrival to seafarers arriving at a Portuguese border for crew changes on any vessel in a Portuguese port, as well as for seafarers transiting through Portugal to join a vessel in another EU Member State or to fly to a third country when entry to Portugal/Schengen is required before the connecting trip.
- In view of the difficulty in aligning flights with embarkation and disembarkation times, allow seafarers to stay in Portugal for up to 10 days for the purposes of on-signing and repatriating, albeit with restrictions of movement.
- Create, in consultation with the aviation industry and other EU Member states, the necessary conditions for seafarer air corridors from the EU Member States 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.

We trust you will use your position to make a difference in practice both through concrete measures in Portugal and by using your diplomatic influence to raise this matter at the highest level in meetings both with EU Member States as incoming Presidency of the Council and 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  
INTERTANKO



Kostas Gkonis  
Secretary General  
INTERCARGO



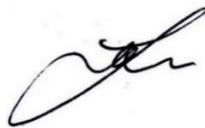
Janet Strode  
General Manager  
IPTA



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

In Annex: Joint Ministerial Statement of the International Maritime Virtual Summit on Crew Changes, Thursday 9 July 2020, hosted by the United Kingdom.

Copied to: The President of the Republic, Mr Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa  
Minister of State and Foreign Affairs, Mr Augusto Santos Silva  
Minister of Infrastructure and Housing, Mr Pedro Nuno Santos  
Minister of the Sea, Mr Ricardo Serrão Santos  
Minister of Home Affairs, Mr Eduardo Cabrita  
Minister of Health, Ms Marta Temido  
Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, Ms Ana Mendes Godinho

## 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 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.

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<sup>1</sup><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).

<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).*