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Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA)
 MARINA Building
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 1018 Port Area (South) Manila

Singapore, 7 October 2020

To : Sec. Arthur Tugade, Department of Transportation

VAdm. Robert A. Empredad, Administrator, Maritime Industry Authority

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

Dear Sirs,

We, the Asian and International social partners for maritime transport together with our maritime partners, would like to thank you for being one of the countries 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.

Some 400,000 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 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 of COVID-19 pandemic.

We acknowledge that all stakeholders in the industry, as well as the IMO, ILO and Asian countries, 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 Asian governments at the highest political level in order to call for urgent action nationally and in partnership with other countries in the world.

The Philippines is a major seafarer supplying country in the world. A significant percentage of the world's seafarers is today supplied by the Philippines including crews for cruise liners, making it an important sea and airport hub for crew changes. In this regard, we fully appreciate the opening of the Ports of Manila, Port Capinpin in Bataan and the Port of Subic, in Zambales for crew change purposes. We are looking forward to the opening of more ports for crew change purposes, especially the major ports in the Visayas and southern provinces of the Philippines. The "Green Lane" adopted by the Philippines to make possible crew change for foreign seafarers and the 50 percent discount on port fees for Capinpin, Orion and Bataan are laudable efforts and well appreciated.

The smooth facilitation of crew changes in Asia, is prevented by, amongst other things, the difficulties of seafarers in obtaining visas. The current practice in most countries, of issuing visas in their missions in third countries and on arrival in sea and air ports, is not functioning efficiently and will clearly not cope with the forecasted two-threefold increase in demand for visas per month in the coming weeks, in view of the backlog of crew changes. We are therefore calling upon the Philippines to introduce temporary visa waivers for crew changes through appropriate means, to be implemented 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, or a valid ticket or booking with the ships' agents as the guarantors of their bona fide identities. Moreover, given the territorial limitation of such a waiver to the State granting it, we also call for cooperation between Asian countries to temporarily allow for a visa free transit area in Asia for seafarers.

Furthermore, the limited availability of flight connections between world seaport hubs and the Asian seafarer supplying countries in order to effect crew changes is another major impediment to crew changes globally. We therefore call on the Philippines to create, in consultation with the aviation industry and other countries, the necessary conditions for seafarer air corridors between crew supply countries and major seaport countries so as to increase access, as soon as possible, to commercial flights. The limited flight options also cause difficulties in aligning flights with vessel embarkation and disembarkation times. Consequently, we commend the Philippines for allowing seafarers of any nationality to stay in the country until the arrival of the flight or ship without restricting the number of days. We call on the Philippines to urge other governments to remove national restrictions and to allow for seafarers to stay in their countries for at least 10 days for the purposes of on-signing and repatriating albeit restricting seafarer movement.

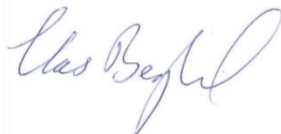
In your position, you can make a difference in practice by using your diplomatic influence and importance as a major seafarer supply country to raise this matter at the highest level in meetings with other governments around the world. This will be extremely important to ensure seafarers, as essential workers for the global trade and economy, can be relieved without any further delay.

On behalf of all the signatories of this letter, we would be pleased to contact your office to set up a meeting with you to discuss this urgent topic and how the actions can be facilitated further.

Yours respectfully,



Mr. Yuichi Sonoda
Secretary General
ASA



Claes Berglund
President ECSA



Guy Platten
Secretary General ICS



Stephen Cotton
Secretary General ITF



Frank Moreels
President ETF



Ukko Metsola
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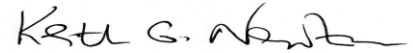
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