



► **New Statement of the Officers of the STC ¹ on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) - 1 October 2020**

The global coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) continues to adversely affect everyone globally and its strength does not appear to diminish. Many countries that have taken the decision to ease the restrictions that affect the daily life of their citizens are now reviewing their policies to balance the need to encourage the economy and national health protection.

With the maritime industry being recognized as one of the fundamental pillars of the global economy this requires a robust and uninterrupted global supply chain to provide necessary materials, foods, medicines and other supplies.

In spite of the maritime social partners and the whole shipping industry gaining momentum on the initiatives aimed at highlighting:

- the unsurpassed dedication of seafarers, and
- the maritime industry in discharging its vital role in support of the global economy since the beginning of the pandemic,

the crew change situation has not yet met the sufficient level required to guarantee the safe and uninterrupted delivery of supplies.

Despite recognition of seafarers as key workers and shipping as an essential asset to the global economy by many governments and international organizations, this has not produced the necessary structural changes needed to facilitate the urgent repatriation and replacement of thousands of seafarers from ships, in the sufficient number required.

¹ The Special Tripartite Committee (STC) is the tripartite body established under Article XIII of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, to keep the working of the Convention under continuous review. The Officers of the STC have been appointed by the ILO Governing Body for a period of three years. They are currently: Ms Julie Carlton from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Chairperson), Mr Martin Marini from Singapore (Government Vice-Chairperson), Mr David Heindel from the United States of America (Seafarer Vice-Chairperson) and Mr Max Johns from Germany (Shipowner Vice-Chairperson). In the framework of this unprecedented crisis, the ILO reached out to them to build the most appropriate responses to the challenges faced by the maritime sector.

The Maritime Social Partners **urge the International Labour Office to continue engaging with governments, including labour supply and port and flag State authorities, to ensure that in these unprecedented circumstances** and before a likely second wave of contagion, every effort is made to facilitate crew changes.

The crew change situation is still critical. It cannot be sustained any longer. A humanitarian crisis is imminent. In addition, it is of the utmost urgency to begin shaping a strategy guaranteeing seafarers medium- and long-term access to ships and to return home in light of growing concerns expressed by the scientific community about the potential time before a suitable vaccine can be developed.

Member States are requested to bring together the appropriate departments and agencies urgently to address the following:

- Recognize seafarers officially and globally as **key workers** and shipping as an essential service to the global community.
- Ensure that, as key workers, seafarers have access to a programme of vaccination, once developed, as a matter of priority to enable them to discharge their crucial role.
- Adopt necessary measures to facilitate crew changes, regardless of the nationality of ships calling in their ports. This should include creating sufficient structures that guarantee a safe flow of seafarers from ships to designated embarkation points and closer cooperation between different government agencies.
- Amend their policies as flag States to prevent seafarers' contracts being extended indefinitely, which will result in increasing substantially the risk of stress and fatigue of seafarers who have worked beyond their agreed contractual tours of duty, and fully exercise their responsibilities to mitigate the risks linked to fatigue and accidents by effectively policing ships and enforcing regulations, including provisions of the MLC, 2006, as amended.
- Provide clear guidance as flag States for ships to ensure that plans to repatriate seafarers are developed including recommendations of ship diversions to ports which may affect crew changes.
- As flag States, consider limiting as much as possible the practice of remote inspection to issue ship certificates to avoid an additional burden for seafarers to assist during remote inspections, increasing mental and physical fatigue.
- Encourage port State control officers to exercise their professional judgement to evaluate safety risks associated with the prolonged extension of contracts, including the level of stress and fatigue amongst seafarers who have already completed their tours of duty.
- As flag States, recommend a consistent approach and develop guidelines on how to handle cases of contagion on board. For this purpose, the most recent version of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Ship Operators for the

Protection of the Health of Seafarers may be used as a reference to supplement an existing policy.

- Develop greater cooperation to agree on reliable and efficient universal testing procedures that can be globally adopted and consistently utilized for seafarers.
- To facilitate crew changes, agree on a universal global testing kit or limit the number which may be approved for seafarers to ensure a more consistent approach among the health requirements of all countries for the transit and testing of seafarers.
- Ensure that robust action is taken to ensure seafarers are not blacklisted or stigmatized for refusing to extend their Seafarers' Employment Agreements or for raising concerns and complaints under the provisions of the MLC, 2006, as amended.
- Do everything in their power to facilitate visa and passport renewals in recognition of the extended periods that many seafarers now experience and to exercise flexibility in facilitating repatriation.

The social partners emphasize the importance of:

- the revised Information Note on Maritime Labour Issues and Coronavirus (COVID-19) of 10 July 2020, and
- the additional points raised above to improve the current situation and to learn from the lessons experienced over the past few months.

This will contribute greatly by adding another important layer to the joint responsibility for the facilitation of crew changes, which we all share.