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4 ALBERT EMBANKMENT  
LONDON SE1 7SR  
Telephone: +44 (0)20 7735 7611 Fax: +44 (0)20 7587 3210

Circular Letter No.4204/Add.6  
27 March 2020

To: All IMO Member States  
United Nations and specialized agencies  
Intergovernmental organizations  
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO

Subject: **Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Preliminary list of recommendations for Governments and relevant national authorities on the facilitation of maritime trade during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The Secretary-General wishes to refer to the outcome of the G20 Leaders Summit on COVID-19 of 26 March 2020, which, inter alia, addressed international trade disruptions and agreed as follows:

**"Addressing International Trade Disruptions**

Consistent with the needs of our citizens, we will work to ensure the flow of vital medical supplies, critical agricultural products, and other goods and services across borders, and work to resolve disruptions to the global supply chains, to support the health and well-being of all people.

We commit to continue working together to facilitate international trade and coordinate responses in ways that avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade. Emergency measures aimed at protecting health will be targeted, proportionate, transparent and temporary. We task our Trade Ministers to assess the impact of the pandemic on trade.

We reiterate our goal to realize a free, fair, non-discriminatory, transparent, predictable and stable trade and investment environment, and to keep our markets open."

Consistent with this important communication from G20 leaders, the Secretary-General has received a *Preliminary list of recommendations for Governments and relevant national authorities on the facilitation of maritime trade during the COVID-19 pandemic*, proposed by a broad cross section of global industry associations with consultative status representing the maritime transportation sector: ICS, BIMCO, CLIA, FONASBA, IACS, IAPH, IMCA, IMEC, INTERCARGO, INTERFERRY, INTERMANAGER, INTERTANKO, IPTA, ITF, P&I Clubs and WSC, in response to the coronavirus outbreak. Member States and international organizations are invited, as appropriate, to make use of the annexed recommendations.

The Secretary-General also wishes to reiterate the message contained in his most recent statement concerning the pandemic which, for ease of reference, is set out below:

"In these difficult times, the ability for shipping services and seafarers to deliver vital goods, including medical supplies and foodstuffs, will be central to responding to, and eventually overcoming, this pandemic.

It is, therefore, crucially important that the flow of commerce by sea should not be unnecessarily disrupted. At the same time, the safety of life at sea and protection of the marine environment must also remain paramount.

One of the goals of IMO, as stated in its Convention, is to ensure availability of shipping services to the commerce of the world, for the benefit of humanity. I urge all IMO Member States to bear this in mind when framing their policy decisions with regard to the coronavirus. Defeating the virus must be the first priority, but global trade, in a safe, secure and environmentally friendly manner must be able to continue, too.

We must also remember the hundreds of thousands of seafarers on ships. They are, unwittingly, on the front line of this global calamity. Their professionalism ensures that the goods we all need are delivered – safely and with minimal impact on our precious environment. These are people, usually far from home and family. Their own health and welfare is as important as that of anyone else.

Again, I urge a practical and pragmatic approach, in these unusual times, to issues like crew changeovers, resupply, repairs, survey and certification and licensing of seafarers.

Together with our industry partners and colleagues in the World Health Organization, IMO has been developing and issuing practical advice and guidance on a variety of technical and operational matters related to the coronavirus. You can find this on our website, and we will be updating this as appropriate as the situation develops.

I will personally be initiating a series of meetings and consultations with leaders from shipping, ports and other key related sectors so that we can all better understand the issues being faced and develop sensible, practical and unified solutions.

I have spoken many times of our "voyage together". Never has the spirit of those words been more important than it is now."

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## ANNEX

### PRELIMINARY LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENTS AND RELEVANT NATIONAL AUTHORITIES ON THE FACILITATION OF MARITIME TRADE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is a global public health crisis, the response to which by Governments requires the maintenance of global supply chains to ensure that the world's medical supplies, food, energy and raw materials, as well as manufactured goods and components vital to the preservation of employment, continue to reach their intended destinations. In this time of global crisis, it is more important than ever to keep supply chains open and maritime trade, transport and services moving.

Maritime transport carries around 90% of world trade, so it is vital that Governments facilitate the continuing operation of shipping, and ports under their jurisdiction, to allow the transport of marine cargoes so that supply chains are not disrupted and to allow the global economy, and society as a whole, to continue to function throughout the pandemic.

As Governments around the world are implementing policies and measures to protect public health and address COVID-19, it is important that these are developed without the introduction of obstacles to ship and port operations, including the movement of seafarers and marine personnel (as defined, *inter alia*, by relevant IMO instruments or the ILO Maritime Labour Convention, 2006) for the purposes of crew change, as well as the wider functionality of port ecosystems (terminals, warehouses, rail and trucking, etc.).

Ships and ports need to remain fully operational, in order to maintain complete functionality of supply chains. Governments and their relevant national authorities should therefore engage with appropriate stakeholders within their national shipping and ports sectors to discuss arrangements for the continued facilitation of international maritime trade, including port hinterland connections.

The purpose of this document is to provide some preliminary recommendations that may assist Governments and their relevant national authorities to take a pragmatic and practical approach to the facilitation of shipping and port operations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Providing access to berths in ports**

Governments and national authorities are strongly encouraged to ensure that all visiting commercial ships continue to have access to berths in port and terminals, and that quarantine restrictions are not imposed *on the ship itself* which prevent access to a berth and the timely discharge and/or loading of cargoes or other critical activities.

#### **Measures to facilitate crew changes in ports**

Governments and relevant national authorities are recommended to:

- Designate professional seafarers and marine personnel, regardless of nationality when in their jurisdiction, as "key workers" providing an essential service.
  - Grant professional seafarers and marine personnel with any necessary and appropriate exemptions from national travel or movement restrictions in order to facilitate their joining or leaving ships.
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- Accept, inter alia, official seafarers' identity documents, discharge books, STCW certificates, seafarer employment agreements and letters of appointment from the maritime employer, as evidence of being a professional seafarer, where necessary, for the purposes of crew changes.
- Permit professional seafarers and marine personnel to disembark ships in port and transit through their territory (i.e. to an airport) for the purposes of crew changes and repatriation.
- Implement appropriate approval and screening protocols for seafarers seeking to disembark ships for the purposes of crew changes and repatriation.
- Provide information to ships and crews on basic protective measures against COVID-19 based on WHO advice.\*

### **Measures to facilitate port (and related) operations**

Governments and relevant national authorities are recommended to:

- Identify port workers, port authority and port service personnel, and, inter alia, other vital ancillary personnel such as pilots, mooring tug and dredger crew, and ship suppliers as "key workers" because they provide an essential service to facilitating shipping and port operations to maintain the movement of cargoes and the conduct of other vital economic activities, regardless of whether they are public or private sector employees.
- Ensure that any special requirements or pre-arrival information required from arriving ships, due to measures introduced in response to COVID-19, are effectively shared and communicated as quickly as possible to international shipping and all relevant stakeholders such as ships' agents, etc.
- Promote the use of electronic solutions for ship-shore, administrative and commercial interactions between all entities operating in a port and ships in order to reduce the risks posed by interaction or the exchange of documents.
- Ensure customs and border control stations in ports, and port health authorities, are provided with sufficient resources to clear and process import and export cargo shipments, ships and crew, taking into account any new protocols or procedures enacted as a result of COVID-19 or for the fact that some port workers may be in self-isolation, caring for others or ill themselves.
- Have arrangements in place so that pilots can continue to embark and disembark from visiting ships to which they are providing critical services to ensure safe navigation.
- Permit any essential ship's classification and statutory surveys and inspections to be undertaken when these are necessary to allow ships to maintain compliance, (notwithstanding any temporary extensions that may be granted by Member States).

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\* <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

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## **Measures to ensure health protection in ports**

Governments and relevant national authorities are recommended to:

- Request ships to report any cases of illness indicative of COVID-19 infection on board as early as possible before arrival to the relevant authority in the port.
- Advise ships to regularly monitor shipboard personnel while in port for the exhibition of any symptoms associated with COVID-19, and report any changes in circumstances of the health of shipboard personnel to the relevant authority in the port.
- Consider temporarily restricting shipboard personnel to the ship while in port (except or until the situation permits otherwise) unless disembarking as part of a crew change or to receive emergency medical attention not available on board the ship.
- Limit, as far as possible, the number of interactions with shipboard personnel by entities in the port to only those critical and essential for the continued operation and supply of the ship.
- Provide information to port workers on basic protective measures against COVID-19 based on WHO advice.
- Ensure those working in ports and having access to ships are provided with appropriate personal protection equipment (which could include masks, hand sanitizers and other means of preventing the spread of the virus) prior to contact with seafarers.
- Request port authorities and port workers to comply with any screening or other protocols or procedures introduced by visiting ships to address COVID-19.
- Provide seafarers with access to emergency medical treatment ashore in the event of medical emergencies.

Reference is also invited to the following previously issued IMO Circular Letter:

- Circular Letter No.4204/Add.1 – Covid-19 – Implementation and Enforcement of relevant IMO Instruments.
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