

20 April 2020

Personal message from IMO Secretary-General Kitack Lim to seafarers

Since the coronavirus became a global pandemic and most of the world has gone into lockdown, we have all had to adjust swiftly to new ways of living and working. But, for many seafarers, this has plunged them into difficult situations that could not have been imagined in modern times.

I, personally, have been deeply touched by the many stories we have heard from individual seafarers of the challenges, hardships and sacrifices that seafarers have made to keep the global supply chain moving while helping the global population. These are challenging times for many seafarers. Both their physical and mental health are being put to the test.

The difficulties the maritime industry has faced in conducting crew changeovers, providing medical care for sick and injured crew, allowing for shore leave and the inability to resupply or repatriate crews concern me greatly. All of us at IMO understand the challenges you face. To all seafarers, my message to you is strong and clear: We are listening. We hear you.

At IMO, we have been in urgent contact with trade unions, seafarer welfare organizations, shipowners, governments and our fellow United Nations agencies, especially the International Labour Organization, to find solutions.

I have written to all our Member States, urging them to recognize all seafarers as “key workers”, remove any barriers to your documentation and lift national travel restrictions so that you can get home on conclusion of your contracts, and rejoin your families. And members of my team here at IMO have been working round the clock to help bring individual cases to a speedy resolution.

Seafarers, my dear colleagues, you are on the front line in this global fight. Your work is essential, and your situation is unique. I wish you good health and good welfare in this time of crisis. I want you to know that you are not alone. You are not forgotten. Stay strong.

Yours sincerely,

Kitack Lim
Secretary-General