

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD MARITIME DAY 24 September 2020

The theme of this year's World Maritime Day – sustainable shipping for a sustainable planet – has gained extraordinary resonance as shipping has continued to transport more than 80 per cent of world trade, including vital medical supplies, food and other basic goods that are critical for the COVID-19 response and recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the professionalism and sacrifice of the two million seafarers who serve on the world's merchant fleet.

I remain very concerned about the growing humanitarian and safety crisis facing hundreds of thousands of these indispensable workers. Despite the unprecedented conditions brought about by the pandemic, seafarers have continued to tirelessly support the often invisible global logistics chain. Physically and mentally exhausted, away from their families and loved ones, their time at sea has now been extended far beyond the standards stipulated in international conventions, with some tours of duty now stretching more than 17 months. Fatigued seafarers cannot operate indefinitely, and disruptions to international shipping would have devastating consequences.

I renew my appeal to Governments to address their plight by formally designating seafarers and other marine personnel as “key workers”, ensuring safe crew changes and implementing the protocols developed by UN agencies, as well as the International Chamber of Shipping and the International Transport Workers' Federation, allowing stranded seafarers to be repatriated and others to join ships.

In the longer term, a sustainable shipping industry is vital. Shipping will play a central role in achieving most, if not all, of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. But shipping activities must be balanced with the long-term health and biodiversity of the oceans. The UN's International Maritime Organization (IMO) has developed global standards which support cleaner and greener shipping. Governments and IMO must continue to work together to support the decarbonization of shipping and improved energy efficiency; the facilitation of shipping through increased digitalization, involving ports; and efforts to ensure the sustainability and protection of the workforce, including a focus on diversity.

Shipping can and must continue to make its contribution to the global economy without upsetting nature's delicate balance. The maritime sector underpins world trade and will continue to be essential for building a sustainable future for people and planet.