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Press Release

ASA SC highlights seafarers' wellbeing and safety as well as their important role in the maritime transition towards green and smart shipping

The 29th Interim Meeting of the Asian Shipowners' Association (ASA) Seafarers Committee (SC) was held in Qingdao, China on 10 April 2024, hosted by China Shipowners' Association.

Environmental awareness is no longer a conversation but an obligation. In July 2023, the IMO updated its initial emission reduction targets and will adopt the mid-term emission reduction measures in the second half of 2025. Meanwhile, smart ships that once looked like a dream are now becoming a reality, which prompts the IMO to adopt a non-mandatory Autonomous Ship Code by the end of this year and a mandatory Autonomous Ship Code by the first half of 2026.

The shipping sector's success has always been heavily dependent on high-caliber seafarers. With the maritime technological and environment friendly innovations and transitions to come over the coming years, seafarers' competencies and skill sets are expected to change accordingly. ASA SC therefore calls on maritime stakeholders in Asia to get prepared to provide seafarers with an upskilled education as per STCW Convention which is being reviewed and revised in the IMO.

Asian seafarers are valuable human resources in the global shipping industry since the vast majority of the world's seafarers continue to be recruited from Asia. Therefore, it has been the long-standing policy of ASA SC to call on maritime stakeholders in Asia to attach importance to and care for the physical and mental health of seafarers, ensure their well-being and provide opportunities for their career development.

On the 19 November 2023, the Galaxy Leader was seized by Houthi forces, the seafarers on board the ship still remain in captivity today. Further, on 6th March, 2024, the vessel M/V True Confidence was fired upon by missiles from Houthi forces, resulting in the loss of lives of two Filipino seafarers, serious injury to several other seafarers onboard and substantial damages to the ship. In these circumstances, seafarers on

board ships that have to transit the area are faced with extreme pressure both physically and mentally, their families at home worry about their safety under the current dreadful situation in this area.

The Red Sea is a crucial waterway linking Europe and Asia. Many ships passing through the affected area are crewed with seafarers from Asia. ASA SC condemns the attacks on civilian merchant ships and the seafarers on board, and urges the international community to find a solution to this unprecedented threat to seafarers.

ASA SC is concerned about reports received from some ASA member shipping companies regarding foreign seafarers facing significant fines imposed by Brazilian immigration authorities for not having biometric SIDs issued under ILO Seafarers' Identity Documents Convention (No. 185).

A large number of seafarers from Asia still carry paper-based identity documents issued under ILO Convention No. 108. Of the 38 countries that have ratified ILO Convention No. 185, except for Brazil, all the other 37 countries continue to pragmatically accept paper-based alternatives for the time being. Brazil's policy to refuse paper-based identity documents results in unwarranted fines for seafarers and shipping companies.

ASA SC appreciates the efforts made by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) in urging Brazilian immigration authorities to reconsider their policy and seeking solutions at the ILO level by reviewing the underlying reasons for the low-level ratifications by ILO members States, and will fully support ICS's further efforts in finding a solution to this issue.

The ASA Seafarers' Committee (SC) is a forum for the ASA member Associations to discuss issues relating to seafarers' development, capacity-building, welfare, wellbeing and other entitlements in accordance with MLC 2006 and STCW Convention.

For media enquiries, kindly contact:

Dylan Ow

Senior Manager Asian Shipowners' Association (ASA)

Tel: (+65) 6325 4737

Email : information@asa.org.sg

Website : www.asianshipowners.org

Editor's Note:

The Asian Shipowners' Association (ASA) is a voluntary organization of the shipowner associations of Australia, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and the Federation of ASEAN Shipowners' Associations comprising shipping associations of ASEAN countries. The aims of the ASA are to promote the interests of Asian shipowners. Between ASA AGM meetings, the ongoing work is carried out by five Standing Committees: The Seafarers Committee (SC), the Ship Insurance and Liability Committee (SILC), the Safe Navigation and Environment Committee (SNEC), the Shipping Policy Committee (SPC), and the Ship Recycling Committee (SRC). It has been estimated that ASA shipowners and managers control and operate around 50% of the world's cargo carrying fleet.