



Ministry of Public Health
Tiwanon road, Mueang Nonthaburi,
Nonthaburi 11000, Thailand

Singapore, 26 October 2020

To Your Excellency Mr. Anutin Charnvirakul, Minister of Public Health

Subject: Crew changes in Covid-19 times – Save our Seafarers, call for action

Dear Sir,

We, the Asian Shipowners' Association (ASA) and International partners for maritime transport, would like to first of all thank you for being one of the few countries to facilitate crew changes while ensuring the highest public health standards and awareness during this COVID-19 pandemic. As each country has entered various degrees of lock-down and also begun to ease some measures, we emphasize that seafarers who have been serving aboard vessels for an extended period of time still do not have an adequate means to embark and disembark from each country. We call for your attention to relieve seafarers and facilitate crew changes, which are currently happening at a rate of only 30% of what is really needed.

Some 400,000 seafarers currently need to be relieved, and this number rises with every week that passes. Some of these seafarers have now spent 15 months or more continuously on board. An equal number are awaiting to join ships. This is a humanitarian crisis that must be solved to protect seafarers that have been on ships for far too long. We are also concerned that any interruption to the flow of trade could have devastating consequences for the recovery phase of COVID-19 pandemic.

We acknowledge that all stakeholders in the shipping industry, as well as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Labour Organization (ILO) and Asian countries, have been working ceaselessly over the past months to enable crew changes to occur. While we welcome all these actions, we consider it is now time for the immediate involvement of the Heads of States and Governments. We are, therefore,

writing to Asian governments in order to call for urgent action nationally and in partnership with other countries around the world.

The smooth facilitation of crew changes in Asia, is prevented by, amongst other things, the difficulties of seafarers in obtaining visas. The current practice in most countries, of issuing visas at their missions in foreign countries and on arrival at sea and air ports, we fear will be overwhelmed with visa requests and unable to cope with the forecasted two-threefold increase in visa demands per month in the coming weeks, along with current backlogs of visas for crew changes. We are therefore seeking Thailand's concurrence in calling for an introduction of a temporary visa waivers for crew changes through appropriate means. These should be implemented nationally for seafarers holding a seafarer's identity document issued in accordance with the ILO Conventions No 108 or No 185, or the IMO Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic, those holding a valid ticket or a booking with ships' agents as the guarantors of their bona fide identities. Moreover, given the territorial limitation of such a waiver to the State granting it, we also call for cooperation between Asian countries to temporarily allow for a visa free transit area in Asia for seafarers.

Furthermore, the limited availability of flight connections between world seaport hubs and the Asian seafarers supplying countries is another major impediment to effecting crew changes globally. We therefore call on Thailand to create, in consultation with the aviation industry and other countries, the necessary conditions for seafarer air corridors between crew supply countries and major seaport countries in the world so as to increase access, as soon as possible, to commercial flights. The limited flight options also cause difficulties in aligning flights with vessel embarkation and disembarkation times. Consequently, we recommend Thailand to allow seafarers of any nationality to stay in the country until the arrival of the flight or ship, without restricting the number of days. We call on Thailand to urge other governments to remove national restrictions and to allow for seafarers to stay in their countries for at least 10 days for the purposes of on-signing and repatriating albeit restricting seafarer movement.

In your position, you can make a difference in practice by using your diplomatic influence and importance as a major seafarer supply country to raise this matter at the highest level in meetings with other governments around the world. This will be extremely important to ensure seafarers, as essential workers for the global trade and economy, can be relieved without any further delay.

On behalf of all the signatories of this letter, we would be pleased to contact your office to set up a meeting with you to discuss this urgent topic and how the actions can be facilitated further.

Yours respectfully,



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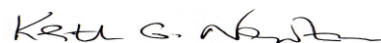
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