



Seafarers' Bulletin

International Transport Workers' Federation

no. 22/2008



**Gambling
with our
rights**

**ITF to the
rescue**

English



Helping you survive at sea

The ITF flag of convenience campaign

The ITF's activities in the maritime industry are spearheaded by the campaign by seafarers' and dockers' unions around the world against the transfer of ships to flags of convenience (FOCs) to evade national laws and conditions and trade unions.

The campaign has two sides: politically the ITF fights with governments and international bodies to ensure that there is a "genuine link" between the owner of a ship and the flag it flies; industrially ITF unions have fought to establish acceptable minimum wages and social standards on all FOC ships.

In effect, the unions seek to agree conditions which at least reach the standards laid down by the ITF Fair Practices Committee – the joint seafarer and docker body which sanctions the FOC campaign. In recent years, the ITF has negotiated an international collective agreement

with a large and growing group of ship operators within the International Bargaining Forum, which provides comparable standards but with more flexibility.

Seafarers who are hired to work on FOC ships are often given strict instructions not to make contact with the ITF. Some are made to sign contracts in which they promise not to do so. There are even some employers who will sign an ITF agreement and then defraud their crews by paying lower wages – a practice known as double book-keeping.

FOC seafarers who have problems with their pay and conditions, or any other grievance about the way they are being treated, can either get in touch with the ITF directly (see our addresses and numbers on page 21) or can contact one of our Inspectors based in ports around the world (see map on centre pages and more details on the reverse of the map).



www.itfglobal.org/flags-convenience

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Further copies of *Seafarers' Bulletin* (published in English, Arabic, Chinese, German, Indonesian, Japanese, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog and Turkish) are available from the ITF at the above address.

Cover photo of Eddy Gómez,
master of the *Fiesta Casino*, by
Ana Lilia Pérez. See story on
pages 14-17.



The crew of the fishing vessel *Enxembre* thank the ITF after the recovery of back pay owed to them. See full story, "Are we seafarers or slaves?", on page 20.

International Transport Workers' Federation



The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) is an international trade union federation of transport trade unions, representing 4½ million transport workers in 148 countries. Founded in 1896, it is organised in eight industrial sections: seafarers, railways, road transport, civil aviation, ports, inland navigation, fisheries and tourism services. It represents transport workers at world level and promotes their interests through global campaigning and solidarity. The ITF is one of 10 Global Union Federations allied to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and part of the Global Unions group.

Seafarers' pay Major rises come into force on 1 January

Seventy thousand seafarers could benefit from a substantial wage rise and significant contractual changes after an agreement was reached at a meeting of the International Bargaining Forum (IBF).

The IBF – comprising ITF representatives and the joint negotiating group (JNG) which brings together employers' groups – met in London in September 2007. Representatives at the meeting agreed on changes to seafarers' pay and conditions to take effect on 1 January 2008. The IBF agreements cover some 70,000 seafarers of all nationalities employed on over 3,500 ships.

The agreement includes an 8 per cent wage increase and a change in contracts in line with the International Labour Organization's Maritime Labour Convention. Both ITF and employers' representatives commented that amending crew contracts towards full compliance with the convention was a considerable achievement. They considered that the IBF contracts were in the forefront of making the industry as a whole compliant with the best and most recent international labour standards for seafarers.

ITF spokesperson Brian Orrell expressed particular satisfaction regarding another key outcome of the negotiations: an agreement to establish IBF developed economy ratings funds. This would encourage companies to offer employment to seafarers from traditional maritime nations who had suffered major job losses during the past two decades.

"This shows," he said, "that the IBF can create innovative solutions to problems and improve the overall standards in the industry for all parties."

The JNG spokesperson, Ian Sherwood, stated that there were a number of measures agreed by the IBF that appealed to the employer organisations. The agreements on implementing IBF contracts more effectively and more flexibly were of particular importance and most welcome.

ITF calls for action Pressure over missing vessel

The ITF called for action in October 2007 over the reported disappearance of a vessel after it left Dubai in June, bound for the Seychelles; 14



ITF Inspector Shwe Tun Aung (second from left) with the crew of the *Safmarine Texas*.

crew members were reported to be on board.

The *ReefAzaria*, registered in St Vincent and the Grenadines and operated by the United Arab Emirates-based Zambezi Shipping Agency, left Dubai on 18 June.

It is believed that the agent last made contact with the vessel on 24 July, when it was located off the coast of Somalia. On board the vessel were eight Tanzanians, two Burmese, two Indians and two Pakistanis.

The ITF, responding to concerns raised by the ITF-affiliated union, the Pakistan Merchant Navy Officers' Association (PMNOA), contacted the shipping agency calling for "openness and cooperation". It also demanded further information about the search for the missing vessel which could be forwarded to the crew members' families.

Finlay Mcintosh, of the ITF Actions Unit, commented: "There are still a lot of unanswered questions and we are demanding that these are addressed by the company. The families of the missing seafarers are suffering because they do not understand what has happened to their loved ones. Our main concern is the whereabouts of the seafarers



Negotiations in US \$40,000 in back pay for Filipino crew

ITF Inspectors from the North American affiliate, the SIU, secured more than US\$40,000 in back pay for eight Filipino crew members on board the *Safmarine Texas*. The 18,030 dwt vessel, built in 1987, is owned by Swiss Marine, of Piraeus, Greece.

Although the ship does have an ITF agreement, the crew was being paid Filipino wages rather than the appropriate ITF wage scale.

Routine

During a routine inspection in Houston, ITF Inspector Shwe Tun Aung was made aware of the discrepancy. Since the ship was sailing to Baltimore, he suggested that ITF Inspector Arthur Petitpas meet the vessel and negotiate with the captain and company.

Petitpas undertook the negotiations and the eight crew members were awarded US\$27,548 in back pay. Additionally, two of them, who had been on board during a previous voyage, were given an extra US\$12,889 to cover that period.

The *Safmarine Texas* was allowed to return to Houston, where the money was waiting for the crew.



Flag of convenience campaign

Owners with flag of convenience ships not covered by ITF agreements

Shipowner	Country	No. ships without ITF agreement
Tidewater	US	270
Government of Democratic People's Republic of Korea	North Korea	161
Archirodon Construction Overseas	UAE	106
Seacor Holdings	US	77
Ofer Brothers Group	Israel	66
Rickmers Reederei	Germany	66
Peter Dohle Schiffahrts-KG	Germany	63
Transocean	US	62
Bernhard Schulte Group	Germany	59
Mitsui OSK Lines	Japan	56
Government of the People's Republic of Myanmar	Burma	54
Groupe Bourbon	France	54
China Ocean Shipping Group	China	52
Egon Oldendorff KG	Germany	51
Government of the People's Republic of China	China	49
Smit International	Netherlands	49
Carnival	US	46
Laskaridis Shipping	Greece	46
Lamnalco Group	UAE	44
Jan de Nul NV	Belgium	42

Source: ITF, 2007



and what is being done to find them.”

There is no evidence to date to suggest that the vessel has sunk or that it has succumbed to piracy.

Reports of a second missing vessel, the Panamanian-flagged *Infinity Marine 1*, owned by Infinity Marine Services in Dubai, have also been filed by the PMNOA. Twenty-three seafarers are believed to be on board.

PMNOA General Secretary Sheikh Mohammad Iqbal commented: “The owners of these flag of convenience vessels are reluctant to pass on any information. They appear to be more concerned about cashing in their insurance claims than helping the families of the seafarers to find out what has happened.”

Back pay

Stranded crew receive their wages

Twenty-five seafarers on board an abandoned vessel in the port of Santander, Spain, have won their fight for back pay.

The crew members of Panama-flagged

cargo vessel *Meugang 1* received outstanding wages backdated to October 2006 following intervention by the ITF and two of its Spanish affiliates, ELA-hainbat and the local branch of the CCOO. The new owner paid the seafarers' claim in full – €187,000 (US\$264,000) to cover wages up to 11 September.

Twenty-four of the seafarers were

“The owners of these flag of convenience vessels appear to be more concerned about cashing in their insurance claims than helping the families of the seafarers to find out what has happened.”

repatriated to their home countries – Cameroon and Ghana. The ship's captain remained in the seafarers' centre in Santander to receive medical treatment before also being repatriated.

“We hope that this will go some way to alleviate the harsh conditions they have had to suffer on board this vessel,” said ITF Inspector Mohamed Arrachedi.

Piracy

ITF backs action off coast of Somalia

The ITF is supporting moves to address incidents of piracy and armed robbery that have plagued vessels sailing off the coast of Somalia.

The ITF has lent its full backing to a proposal to take the issue of piracy and armed robbery close to the Somali coast to the UN Security Council. The proposal, made by the IMO Secretary-General, was endorsed by the Council of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which met for its 98th session from 25-29 June 2007 in London, UK.

It is hoped that this will lead to a request to the transitional federal government of Somalia to take action to prevent piracy and armed robbery. This includes allowing ships to enter its territorial waters when they are attempting to deal with acts of piracy or armed robbery which are putting the safety of crew members at risk. The proposal particularly refers to vessels bringing humanitarian aid to Somalia.

Renewed attacks on ships have been prompted by recent instability in Somalia, with a rising number of reported incidents.

Jon Whitlow, ITF Seafarers' Section Secretary, commented: “The ITF welcomes the IMO's initiative and we supported it at the IMO Council. It is to be hoped that urgent action will result and that seafarers will no longer be subject to such attacks and held hostage against the payment of a ransom.”

Fishers

Victory for embattled crews

The ITF has warmly welcomed a vote at the International Labour Organization (ILO) to adopt the Work in Fishing Convention, a





The crew of the *Marybelle* were jubilant when they received their back pay.

Action in Liverpool

Owner is forced to pay up for five ships

By Tommy Molloy, ITF Inspector in Liverpool, UK

Maryville Maritime of Greece is a company which last year was very welcome in the port of Liverpool but found it difficult to leave until its crews had been paid what they are entitled to.

The first of the company's vessels that I inspected in 2007 was the *Smart*. A total of US\$46,000 in owed wages was claimed for the crew and the company paid up with very little fuss. I also had to complete ITF contracts for all the crew, as they did not exist. The ones on board were at much lower rates than the ITF wage scale the company had agreed to implement.

Some months later the *Evangelistria* visited the port and the same problems were exposed. This time US\$160,000 in owed wages was recovered.

The next vessel to visit was called *Princess 1* and when I boarded I was greeted by the company's port captain, who had been flown in from Greece to deal with my inspection. This time the paperwork on board was very different. Almost everything was in line with the requirements of the ITF agreement for the vessel. There was the small matter of employing two deck boys and two mess boys who were all over the age of 21 (one in his

30s) and so new ITF contracts of employment were made out for them promoting them to ordinary seamen and mess room stewards respectively. Almost US\$3,000 was calculated for one of the mess room stewards but the other three had only joined the vessel a few days earlier.

A few days later I boarded the *Renuar*. Once again I was greeted by the port captain, who had again been flown in to Liverpool to ensure that everything was above board. However, I discovered that overtime had neither been recorded properly nor paid in accordance with the agreement. I calculated that US\$13,504 remained outstanding. The claim would have been much higher had a large percentage of the crew not been paid off a few days earlier. The company made arrangements for the owed wages to be paid promptly.

The port captain advised me that two more of the company's vessels were due into Liverpool later in April and that, although he would much rather spend this holiday with his family, he would doubtless be required to fly into Liverpool yet again.

A couple of days after Easter the vessel *Marybelle* arrived in Liverpool. As I arrived at the gangway the port captain assured me that this time everything was perfect on

board and that I would definitely find no problems.

Unfortunately, this vessel provided evidence that in reality the company was systematically cheating its crews of their rightful wages. I was given a list of payments to all crew dated 31 December 2006 for a total of US\$89,000. This was the difference between what the company had been paying and what they should have paid in accordance with the ITF agreement. Each crew member had signed the money as received and a statement beneath the list of payments attested that the crew had no outstanding claims. There was a similar list dated 31 March for a total of US\$53,000 and again all crew had signed it as received.

I advised the port captain that I did not believe the crew had received the amounts stated or that the wage accounts for January, February and March were genuine. He told me that if I could find one crew member who would say he had not received the money he would pay. What he did not realise was that I had already found a set of the genuine wage accounts and, when I presented him with them and called the Filipino crew one by one, they bravely stated they had not received the wages they had been made to sign for. There was little he could do but agree my calculation for owed wages, which this time amounted to US\$96,000.

So far, this company has had to pay out over US\$300,000 for its ships in the port of Liverpool in little over a year. But they have not had to pay a penny more than they had already agreed to pay.

“This vessel provided evidence that in reality the company was systematically cheating its crews of their rightful wages.”



Federico Arogante (right) with ITF Inspector Ulf Christiansen outside the hospital in Hamburg where the Filipino seafarer received treatment for his hand injury.

Injury at sea

More than a helping hand

A Filipino seafarer faced the loss of his seafaring career following an accident at sea until speedy intervention by the ITF brought him essential medical treatment.

Federico Arogante, an oiler on a Greek-flag ship, contacted Hamburg-based ITF Inspector Ulf Christiansen in February 2007 as he was extremely worried that the accident would prevent him from ever working again as a seafarer.

He had injured his left hand four weeks previously after falling from a ladder while working in the engine room during the vessel's stay in the Russian port of Primorsk. He had been sent to a hospital in Primorsk, where his hand was put in plaster.

When his vessel arrived in the dry dock at Hamburg four weeks later, the 36-year-old seafarer was sent to a hospital for a check-up. The Hamburg doctors found out that Arogante had been given the wrong treatment in Russia – his left hand should have been operated on rather than put in plaster. This error had affected his hand and its mobility was already restricted.

“Mr Arogante was extremely worried about losing the ability to work as seafarer in the future and called the ITF office in Hamburg for assistance,” explains Ulf Christiansen.

The ITF asked the doctors in the general hospital in Hamburg to send Arogante to a special clinic in the city for industrial accidents. They agreed to this transfer, as did the master of his vessel, the *Propontis*. The ITF also informed the local agent about his planned transfer.

“I escorted Mr Arogante while he received several checks in the hospital,” says Christiansen. “He was checked by the specialist doctors for hand injuries, who decided that his hand must be operated on to avoid a permanent disability.”

Arogante was operated on successfully, and received hospital treatment for two and a half months, including extensive therapy for his left hand. “Mr Arogante was visited regularly by his former crew members, the seafarers’ mission and myself,” says Christiansen. “The Greek shipping company arranged for his wife to stay in Hamburg for some weeks.”

After his lengthy hospital treatment, Arogante was finally able to move and work with his hand, and the doctors are optimistic that he will be able to continue his career as a seafarer. He was sent back home to the Philippines for further treatment in May and was due to return to the Hamburg hospital at the end of 2007 to have a plate removed from his hand.

Before he left Hamburg in May, Arogante sent a card to the ITF office. “I want to say thank you very much for all the time that you’re supporting me,” he told Christiansen. “You had been part of my second life; I can say you are my hero. Me and the whole of my family say thank you very much.”

“He was extremely worried that the accident would prevent him from ever working again as a seafarer.”



move that the ITF and its affiliated unions have long campaigned for.

The vote, which was announced in June 2007, saw 437 in favour of the convention, two against, and 22 abstentions.

ITF Seafarers’ Section Secretary Jon Whitlow commented: “Two years ago the ILO Fisheries Convention failed to be adopted on a technicality, being one vote short of the quorum. Since then we’ve redoubled our efforts to get protection for fishing crews through social dialogue with responsible employers and concerned governments.

“This vote is a major step towards gaining decent work for fishers and setting an international minimum standard for the sector. It should also provide a tool to curb illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and prevent some of the worst abuses that we know take place within this sector. The work does not stop now – we need to ensure that the convention is ratified and implemented and makes a real difference to fishers in their workplace.”

Earlier in the month, ITF General Secretary David Cockroft addressed the International Labour Conference. Speaking in favour of the convention, he told the assembly: “Fishers desperately need this convention. Fishing is the most dangerous industry on earth. It also has some of the nastiest conditions. We have documented examples of some fishing boat owners responding to

“Fishing is the most dangerous industry on earth. It also has some of the nastiest conditions.”

organising efforts by crews by throwing those responsible into the sea.”

Welfare

Go-ahead for South East Asia project

A major project aimed at dramatically enhancing seafarers' welfare facilities across South East Asia has been given the go-ahead.

Delegates representing seafarers' welfare organisations, who attended an International Committee on Seafarers' Welfare (ICSW) meeting in September 2007 in Singapore, expressed their support for the programme. As part of the initiative, four years' worth of funding will be provided to examine, update and extend welfare provision in the region.

Keynote speaker Captain Derrick Atkinson, of BW Shipping of Singapore, provided evidence that most seafarers in South East Asia had no contact at all with welfare workers: two Burmese seafarers related their own, similar experiences. A recent Seafarers' International Research Centre report on port-based welfare services backed up these accounts.

Representatives of shipowners, trade unions, religious organisations, port authorities and governments will now form a regional welfare committee to initiate the programme. It is anticipated that the initiative, which mirrors those already carried out in Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America, will be funded by the ITF Seafarers' Trust and monitored by the ICSW.

Tom Holmer, of the ITF Seafarers' Trust, commented: "In the other regions, such programmes have helped to develop a network of seafarers' centres and services that closely meet the needs seafarers themselves have identified as the most important. We are all confident that the same can be achieved in this region."

Fishers

Protest over 'horrific deaths' at sea

The ITF has targeted the "ruthless exploitation of migrant workers" in a statement on the death of 39 Burmese fishers on board a Thai fishing fleet. They had been left without fresh food and water for 75 days. It is alleged that the owner and captain



Strike in Turkey

Owner barred from ship until crew are paid

A strike in the Turkish port of Tuzla by crew members of the *Sky Sea* (above) ended with victory in November last year thanks to the assistance given by local ITF affiliate Dad-Der. The 10 strikers – out of a crew of 12 – shared out US\$50,612 in back pay.

The crew had been on board for five months without being paid. Indeed, two of them were owed nine months' pay. Dad-Der were contacted in October for help. The vessel was loaded with iron scrap and was waiting to berth.

At first the owner refused to cooperate in reaching a settlement. So the crew – except for the master and chief engineer – followed Dad-Der's advice and refused to sail from anchorage to the port. They took the accommodation ladder on board and declared that they would not allow anybody on board apart from the ITF.

Indeed, the owner was turned away when he tried to board.

Dad-Der warned the agent and owner that the ship would be arrested if the money was not paid within one week. The agent called and acknowledged that full payment would be made within a few days.

“They took the accommodation ladder on board and declared that they would not allow anybody on board apart from the ITF.”

ordered their bodies to be thrown overboard.

The statement, released by the ITF Fisheries Section committee in April 2007, expressed grave concern over the horrific death of the fishers working on six trawlers in Indonesian waters. They had no access to supplies while they were waiting for their permits to be renewed.

Relatives of the dead fishers and survivors began legal action on 26 March in an effort to win justice.

One of the survivors, Soe Moe, stated in court in Mahachai, Thailand: "There was no food, no vegetables, just smelly rice, and there

were dead bodies close to me. I was afraid but I didn't know what to do or whether I was going to die, because at the time I was so weak I couldn't even walk."

The ITF declared: "It is hoped that the court case will expose this modern form of slave labour and lead to criminal charges. In addition, the committee urges the Indonesian government to take action to prevent the perpetration of such appalling human rights abuses in its waters and for the Thai authorities to take the appropriate sanctions

ITF called

Filipino seafarers fall ill after inhaling engine room smoke

When the Filipino crew of the Greek-owned *Evangelia* docked in Hamburg, Germany, in August 2007 they turned to the ITF to help them deal with appalling conditions on board.

Most of the seafarers were sick and needed a medical check-up, and some asked for repatriation because of the unhealthy conditions on board – especially in the engine room. To add insult to injury, they had not been paid according to the ITF/PNO (Pan-Hellenic Seamen's Federation) agreement that the shipowners had signed, and none had ITF employment contracts.

The Greek company Hellas Marine took over this vessel in Malta in February 2007, and the problems in the engine room started two months later. There was permanent smoke in the engine room due to leaky pipes. The crew inhaled this smoke for the next four months, until the vessel arrived in Hamburg. There, the seafarers forwarded a message to the ITF office – “Exhaust manifold of main engine strong leakage of carbon monoxide when running. That causes engine crew difficulty to breathe.”

The ITF immediately contacted the port state control (PSC) and the port health authority in Hamburg to report these bad conditions. As the PSC had received information about the vessel from its last port, Amsterdam, it had already detained it – and discovered more than 40 deficiencies.

The port health authority visited the vessel the morning after the ITF raised the alarm and checked most of the crew members. It recommended that some of the crew needed a doctor's visit as they had been: “exposed to smoke, cough, sore throat, dark sputum, chest pain”. The doctor declared four crew members unfit for work, and all were repatriated from Hamburg to Manila, Philippines, at the shipowner's expense.

ITF Inspector Ulf Christiansen points out that more of the crew needed medical attention, but “it seemed clear

that most of the crew members did not want to get a medical check-up, as they probably feared being declared unfit for work, and then being repatriated”.

The vessel was detained in Hamburg after it had finished unloading, and extensive repairs were undertaken in the engine room. A final PSC check found no more smoke in the engine room.

All the crew members were checked twice by the port health authority during the vessel's stay in the port.

While the *Evangelia* was in Hamburg the ITF discovered that the crew had not been paid according to the current ITF agreement and requested the company to pay the outstanding wages to the crew during the vessel's stay in the port.

After some discussions, the company finally agreed to this, and the requested amount was remitted to the local agent's bank account and transferred to the vessel. A total back pay of US\$28,336 for June and July 2007 was paid out to the crew while they were in Hamburg.

The ITF has asked the shipowner to pay the crew according to the current ITF/PNO agreement in the future, and the master has also agreed to fill out and distribute ITF employment contracts to the crew.

“It seemed clear that most of the crew members did not want to get a medical check-up, as they probably feared being declared unfit for work, and then being repatriated.”



against its nationals involved in the ruthless exploitation of migrant workers.”

The statement also referred to the continuing plight of Burmese fishers who were discharged without travel documents from their Thai-flagged vessels in Tual, Indonesia. Although settled in the region, their lack of refugee status makes them vulnerable to extortion by local security firms and immigration officers. The ITF has therefore urged the Indonesian government to grant them refugee status.

Maritime policy Europe's 'wasted opportunity'

The ITF's European region, the ETF, has criticised proposals for a European Union (EU) maritime policy for their failure to address a number of key issues affecting seafarers.

Adopted by the European Commission on 10 October 2007, the Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union, also known as “the blue paper”, has been a wasted opportunity, according to the ETF. Its proposals fall far short of addressing the dramatic employment crisis affecting EU seafarers by endorsing less regulation and greater self-regulation without measures to reduce the effects of competition on employment.

The ETF welcomed the move to consult the social partners on proposals to reassess the grounds on which seafarers are excluded from certain EU social directives, but expressed concerns over a number of other issues that remain unresolved. These include the lack of any reference to the discrimination suffered by seafarers on board EU-flagged vessels on the basis of their residence or nationality and the failure to mention the impact of flag of convenience and substandard shipping on seafarers.

us Bid to ease shore leave rules

A merchant marine committee is urging the US government to make access to shore leave easier for seafarers, in line with states' obligations outlined in a key maritime code.

A meeting of the Merchant Marine Personnel Advisory Committee made a

number of recommendations for improving access to shore leave for seafarers in April 2007. Participants at the Seattle event, including representatives from unions and the Apostleship of the Sea, which provides pastoral care to seafarers through chaplaincies, also highlighted the need to make ship visits by chaplains and union representatives easier.

The recommendations, which were based on information contained in the ITF report, "Access denied", pointed out that states' obligations to facilitate shore leave for seafarers were outlined in the International Maritime Organization's International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS).

Recommendations included a call for key aspects of the ISPS code to be reviewed and, following this, for shipowners or operators to ensure vessel personnel have access to shore leave and to visitors to the vessel— including seafarers' welfare and labour organisation representatives. Another urged the US Coast Guard not to approve facility security plans that fail to include procedures for allowing shore leave and visitor access.

Jeff Engels, ITF Coordinator in Seattle, who attended the meeting, commented: "Hopefully, the United States Coast Guard will take these recommendations into consideration. It is vital that seafarers' right to shore leave be upheld, so they can visit shore-based welfare facilities, including medical centres."

Europe Week of action makes 'lasting difference'

The ITF's week-long action targeting substandard working conditions on board vessels operating across northern Europe has been pronounced an overwhelming success

"It is vital that seafarers' right to shore leave be upheld, so they can visit shore-based welfare facilities, including medical centres."



Local union activists in Heysham, United Kingdom, get ready to go into action during the ITF's Northern Europe Week of Action from 4-8 June 2007 when scores of flag of convenience and substandard ships were targeted for inspection.

that will leave a lasting impact on the lives of seafarers.

During the ITF week of action, which ended on 8 June 2007, ITF Inspectors, dockers' and seafarers' unions investigated both flag of convenience vessels and those flying a national flag to help secure decent conditions on board. The week of action was held in Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the UK.

Key successes included 12 new agreements on vessels in Germany, a number of which were achieved following actions such as boycotts on board the *CMA CGM Iguacu* in Hamburg and the *MSC Bremen*, both ships Liberian-registered. Solidarity actions also took place in Cherbourg, France, where a blockade of the *Normandy* was lifted after Irish Ferries and Celtic Link agreed to begin talks about a collective bargaining agreement.

Meanwhile, in Poland, discussions over an ITF agreement were set up between unions and owners of the Panamanian-flag *Eleni K*, and shipowner Columbia Shipmanagement

pledged to sign an ITF collective agreement for the Marshall Islands-registered *Cape Fulmar*.

ITF Maritime Coordinator Steve Cotton described the event as "outstanding". He commented: "Hundreds of ships have been inspected across the continent and issues such as safety, owed wages and poor working conditions tackled. We've seen excellent support from our docker colleagues, from unions and across national boundaries.

"This event has made a difference that will last far beyond this week."

Cargo handling ITF outrage in row over self-discharging

The ITF expressed outrage at the use of seafarers to carry out specialised dock work, following an incident in Port Kembla, Australia, in May 2007.

The Italian-owned, Maltese-registered bulker *Capo Noli* was at the centre of local and international protests after the crew were told to use the ship's cranes to unload gypsum. The *Capo Noli* was on its first visit to Port Kembla on a charter for Canada Steamship Lines (CSL) and replaced an Australian-flagged and crewed ship that was not a self-discharging vessel.

The Filipino crew were asked to unload using the ship's equipment in direct violation of the terms of the ITF-approved agreement covering the ship, which states that neither ships' crews nor others on board can be asked to carry out cargo handling work without the prior agreement of the local



ITF campaign against flags of convenience and substandard shipping

Facts and figures for 2007

➔ ITF Inspectors visited a total of 9,545 vessels during 2007 – an average of more than one in each hour of every day of the year.

➔ Inspections took place in 657 ports around the world.

➔ The ITF flag of convenience campaign resulted in a total of more than US\$16.6 million being recovered in back wages and compensation for crews during 2007.

➔ Eighty-two per cent of the inspections carried out by the ITF were of flag of convenience vessels (see list of FOCs on page 25), with special attention on those vessels with a poor record.



➔ The ITF has 120 Inspectors in the ports of 43 countries around the world.

➔ During 2007, seafaring members of ITF-affiliated unions and crews on flag of convenience ships took industrial action in support of the ITF campaign in 21 countries on four continents.

➔ The number of seafarers covered by ITF collective agreements in 2007 was 209,950 (193,325 in 2006).

➔ A total of 9,105 ships registered with a flag of convenience were covered by ITF agreements in 2007 (8,161 in 2006).



dockers' union. Members of the ITF's affiliate in Australia, the MUA, have traditionally carried out this work. In another violation of the agreement, the local ITF Inspector was denied access to the crew.

A community picket sprang up to support the union and messages of solidarity with the Port Kembla workers poured in from all over Australia, amid fears that this incident heralded further attacks on decent conditions on the Australian waterfront.

"ITF unions worldwide are appalled by this incident," said ITF General Secretary David Cockroft. "Dock workers have a very important role in supporting seafarers' rights – but they also have the right to decent work and safe conditions. The ITF stands fully behind the MUA and the community in Port Kembla in their fight for fair treatment for dockers as well as seafarers."

AP Moller-Maersk ITF welcomes dialogue with global operator

A meeting between Danish shipping giant AP Moller-Maersk and ITF-affiliated trade unions representing its workers in 22 countries closed in April 2007 in Copenhagen, Denmark, after what the ITF described as "the first steps in a journey that we hope will benefit both the company and its workers".

Representatives from 32 unions attended the two-day conference, which was hosted by Danish union 3F. Knud Pontoppidan, Senior Vice President of AP Moller-Maersk, addressed the meeting and then attended the closing press conference.

Addressing the press conference that followed, ITF President Randall Howard said: "We believe that in an era of globalised economies trade unions need both to coordinate more effectively among ourselves and to develop constructive relationships with major companies like AP Moller-Maersk who are ready to begin a dialogue which can bring benefits both to workers and the company."

● You can access current news about ITF and trade union activities concerning seafarers at:
www.itfglobal.org/seafarers/index.cfm

Estonia

Two crews share \$648,236 after ships are arrested

By Jaanus Kuiv, ITF Inspector in Tallinn

In July 2006 I started to receive complaints from seafarers on the Maltese-flag *Isis* about owed wages. I contacted the company Janifeld Shipping Company, based in Estonia, informing them about the owed wages and their responsibilities.

The company replied by saying that, after selling one of its vessels, the wages to the crew would be paid out.

But nothing happened. From August until October 2006, I received further complaints about the owed wages. Then in October we received information that the vessel had been sold to a new owner, Nordic Shipping Group. This company then signed an ITF agreement in France covering the *Fiona*, also registered in Malta, and paid out the owed wages to the crew members' families in Estonia and wages to the crew up to October 2006 totalling US\$97,161.

We held meetings with crew members on board the *Fiona* and *Isis* and the representative of the company, Oleg Balabanov, informed us about the ownership and about the payment of

back pay from 4 October 2006.

During November 2006 we had more meetings with Balabanov. We also signed a memorandum of agreement where we agreed the schedule of payment to the crew. Also the bank was informed about the owed wages and about our agreement.

But at the end of November we heard from the bank that the credit for Balabanov to buy the vessels had not been accepted. Immediately we asked our lawyers to arrest the vessels.

The *Fiona* was arrested on 15 December 2006 to secure the claim by 11 seafarers for some US\$100,000 in back pay. The *Isis* was arrested three days later on behalf of the 27 seafarers owed about US\$150,000.

We took those cases to the court and on 18 January 2007 the court ruled in our favour.

The vessels were auctioned. On 23 April the *Isis* and on 4 June the *Fiona* were sold to Evir Shipping Company. The total sum of owed wages up to June 2007, calculated and paid to the crews, was: US\$333,966 for the *Isis* and US\$314,270 for the *Fiona*.

"At the end of November we heard from the bank that the credit to buy the vessels had not been accepted."



Jaanus Kuiv beside one of the arrested ships.



Attention all
former crew
members of the
Enchanted Capri
(IMO 7359474)

The ITF is holding settlement funds for certain former crew members of the Bahamas-flag *Enchanted Capri* recovered following litigation in the United States. If you served on board the *Enchanted Capri* during 2000/2001, and you were owed wages, then please contact the ITF as soon as possible to check if settlement funds are due to you.

Please contact us using the following details:

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Internet: www.itfglobal.org



The crew of a casino ship moored in the Gulf of Mexico was left stranded when corrupt dealings led the owners to abandon the operation; ANA LILIA PÉREZ reports.

The *Fiesta Casino*, owned by the US consortium, Fiesta Cruise Line, was the first ship of its kind to operate in Mexico. But it now lies rotting in the Gulf of Mexico, after its crew was abandoned without fuel, drinking water or food.

Registered as a “dead ship” by the International Maritime Organization, the 15-man crew – mainly Mexican – had to remain on board, along with US captain Eddy Narciso Gómez, all victims of corrupt Mexican officials and abandoned by the owners.

This situation arose after the crew made a complaint against Fiesta Cruise Line and its subsidiaries, Trident Gaming Development, MHD Enterprise LLC and MHD Mexicana, for not having paid them for months. When the vessel became subject to a judicial injunction, it could not be moved and the crew could not leave it.

Modern-day pirates

A web of corruption had surrounded the *Fiesta Casino* since it arrived in Mexican waters more than two years ago.

The then Minister of the Interior promised to grant Fiesta Cruise Line a licence to operate casino ships in Mexican waters. However, when MHD sailed the ship into



Cover story

Capt Eddy Gómez (left) on board the Fiesta Casino. Together with the rest of the crew, he was effectively abandoned by the owners and the port authorities.

Casino of shame

waters off the coast in August 2005, it presented fraudulent documents issued by the Communications and Transport Secretariat (SCT) and a navigation permit issued by the Merchant Navy Administration (DGMM). Although the Puerto Juárez harbour master discovered that the documents were

false, he allowed it to proceed to Cozumel and Playa del Carmen, where it started to operate as a casino ship.

At this point, says Enrique Lozano, ITF Inspector in Mexico, the owner had not paid the then mainly Filipino crew for months, had not supplied them with fuel, food or water,

and, as foreigners, they were not allowed to disembark. After pressure from the ITF, the company paid the crew, who won back pay of more than US\$81,000 in January 2006.

However, three months later, with the departure of the captain, conditions worsened. The harbour master refused to intervene, despite the trade law and international treaties that require him to do so. The ITF again intervened and the crew was disembarked. The ship was moved to Progreso, Yucatán, where it was illegally allowed to dock and recruit a Mexican crew.

In August 2006, the harbour master authorised the vessel to dock in Veracruz. The vessel's Panamanian flag was replaced with the Belize flag. It then anchored off the Isla de Sacrificios, having travelled 12,000 nautical miles, and began to operate as a casino secretly.

For four weeks, the casino opened only for "special guests" – state government and SCT officials. The *Tórtola Fast Ferry*, a 280-passenger vessel belonging to the same company, was used to transport the gamblers. On 14 October 2006, on the ferry captain's day off, the ferry ran aground.

"A web of corruption had surrounded the Fiesta Casino since it arrived in Mexican waters more than two years ago."



● Thinking of taking industrial action?

● Read this first!

The ITF is committed to assisting seafarers serving on flag of convenience ships to get just wages and proper collective agreement coverage.

Sometimes seafarers have to resort to legal action in local courts. On other occasions boycott action may be taken against a ship. Different actions are right for different places. The right action in one country may very well be wrong in another.

What you must do first is contact the local representative of the ITF. You will find contact email addresses and phone numbers in the centre of this bulletin. There is also a fax form on page 30. You should seek local advice before you take any action.

In some countries, the law actually works against you and your fellow crew members if you take strike action, and in such a case, the local ITF union representatives will explain this to you.

In many more countries, the key to winning a dispute is strike action. Once again, this depends on the local advice you receive. You have the legal right to strike in many countries, so long as your ship is in port and not at sea.

In any strike action it is important to remember to remain disciplined, peaceful and united. And remember, the right to strike is a basic human right guaranteed, in many countries, by the law or constitution.

Whatever you choose to do, don't forget to talk to the local ITF representatives before you do anything. Working together, we can win the battle for justice and basic rights.



Casino of shame

Within 15 minutes, two Mexican navy launches came to collect the “special guests”. The ferry crew (five seafarers, two engineers and the helmsman) were left on board for 15 days without food, water or cabins.

Helmsman Carlos Anaya said that the owners inhumanely abandoned them to their fate. “We had nothing. We slept in chairs. They would sometimes bring water and food but almost nothing.”

After the ferry's dramatic accident, the state government had to acknowledge the existence of the casino ship in Veracruz waters. The Deputy Director of the Merchant Navy, Raymundo Mata Contreras, urged Capt Gómez to get the crew to abandon the ship.

The crew was disembarked, and the state government took the ferry to a private dock. The governor ordered the *Fiesta Casino* to be painted, replaced the Belize flag with one with the arms of his government, and changed its name. The ship is now used for private events.

Crew abandoned

On 22 February 2007, the shipping agency, Rojas Vela and Associates, refused to continue acting as consignee for MHD Mexicana. The *Fiesta Casino* crew of 15, including those from the grounded ferry, was then abandoned to its fate, with the vessel moored at Gulf Naval Workshops (TNG) for repair.

Eddy Gómez asked the harbour master for support, but was told that he could not intervene. The captain claims that neglect by the port authorities contributed to the crew's problems. On 4 May, the seafarers managed to get the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Council to recognise that they had “seized” the ship until the case came to court. But they paid a high price for this precautionary measure. They could not disembark, because this meant they were “abandoning the ship” and so would lose months of wages.

Until 15 June, when they were finally able to leave, the crew had to survive with no

“The crew had to survive with no supplies of food, except soft drinks and bread sent to them by trade unions, and had to endure life on board with no lights on at any time.”



supplies of food, except soft drinks and bread sent to them by trade unions, and had to endure life on board with no lights on at any time.

Despite the privations, the crew worked hard to maintain the carpets, the lights and the bars of the once-splendid ship, built in Norway in 1986 and used as a casino on the Florida coast until 2004. But the *Fiesta Casino* was already a dead ship.

The captain described the situation: "Yesterday was like all the other days we have spent here, full of worry, anxiety and suffering. The wind increased to 80km per hour, hitting our ship full on, which has been subject to a blackout since 14 March... Since November 2006, we have not had a drop of fuel. Water and provisions are at zero. We have not been paid for months. The harbour master has been informed but has not responded. The TNG and the shipowner are violating and disregarding the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code."

Enrique Lozano pointed the finger of blame at SCT officials: "SCT omission and neglect makes it complicit".

A captain for 30 years, including seven years with the Fiesta Cruise Line consortium, Gómez says he was also ignored by his embassy when he asked for help. He had tried to return to Florida in February, but two days before he was due to fly, a state Migration Service official retained his passport. Gómez says the dispute about the ship became entangled with corruption by federal and state officials.

"It's a shame," he says. "Shameful casino."

Ana Lilia Pérez is a journalist working for the Mexican investigative magazine Contralinea. This is an edited version of an article that appeared in Contralinea. Capt Eddy Gómez has since been repatriated to Miami.



Free ship information online

- Do you want to know more about the ship you work on?
- Do you want to find out if your ship is covered by an ITF acceptable collective agreement?
- Do you want details of your ship's safety record?

If so, you might want to visit www.equasis.org for free ship information online.

This website provides free searchable ship information including ownership details and port state control (PSC) inspections. It also includes important ITF information including details of any ITF agreement that exists on board, a summary of the last recorded crew list, and the date and location of last ITF inspection.

In order to access this information all you have to do is register. It is free of charge and very simple.

How to register

- Go to www.equasis.org.
- Select "Registration" from the top of the screen.
- If you agree to the terms and conditions, select "Accept" at the bottom of the page.
- A registration form will appear. Enter your preferred username and password, and enter your name, address, email and any other details.
- Once you have completed this process you will receive confirmation that your registration is complete and you can begin using the Ship Search service.

How to use the service

You can search for a ship by name, call sign or IMO (International Maritime Organization) number. When you search for a ship, the main page will display:

- Ship information – name, ship type, flag, build year.
 - Management – details of ownership.
 - Classification societies.
 - Safety management.
 - P&I insurers' information.
- You can choose from the top menu:
- Certification.
 - Inspection and manning – port state control (PSC) inspections, PSC human element, International Labour Organization, ITF etc.
 - History – flag, ownership history etc.

Impressions of life at sea with the professionals

By **STEVEN MCKAY** (author of the study of Filipino seafarers summarised below)

“Being a seafarer is like a paid prison sentence with a good chance of drowning.” This maybe a cliché among seafarers, but when I first heard a seafarer wryly sum up his onboard life this way, I was struck at how succinctly he captured the uniqueness of living and toiling at sea.

As a researcher, I was onboard for a total of only two and a half months.

Yet I got a taste of the lonely, isolated and often dangerous conditions, both

by pitching in on deck, but mainly, by listening to seafarers tell me about their lives, families and work.

One reason seafarers seemed eager to tell their stories was that I could readily relate: my own father is a retired merchant seafarer who sailed for over 35 years, making his way from wiper to second engineer.

Sharing my own memories of growing up with a far-flung father helped bring out the seafarers’ tales.

Probably their most common lament was the cruel irony of having shipped out to support their

families, yet this same choice causing them to miss so many key family moments – a son’s first words, a daughter’s wedding, the passing of a parent.

But, despite the hardships, these seafarers found ways to find real meaning in their work and life onboard. Whether it was navigating through a force 11 storm, “remedying” a solution to a vexing engine problem or simply cooking a delicious meal on a tight budget, they all carried themselves as professionals and quite proudly called themselves “Filipino seamen”.

Down, but not out

Nearly one in every three workers at sea is from the Philippines. Filipinos make up the largest national group of seafarers, with over a quarter of a million in the industry.

A recent academic study by Steven C McKay, Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, looks at how Filipino seafarers see themselves. Based on 100 two-hour interviews with seafarers in the Philippines in 2003, it contains some enlightening insights into how seafarers construct their identity.

A long history

McKay’s study points to the long history of Filipino merchant seafarers since they were forced labour aboard Spanish galleons in the 16th century. Filipinos virtually disappeared from international commercial shipping after 1936, when the US barred foreigners from their ships. Nevertheless, Filipinos exploded on to the labour market in the 1970s, aided by the move to flags of convenience and the search for cheaper labour. Shipping firms were attracted to Filipinos for their English-language training and certification based on American standards, he says.

An academic study shows how Filipino seafarers challenge their image as subservient ‘heroes’.

In a single year in the 1980s, Filipinos on European-owned ships went from 2,900 to 17,057. Their numbers worldwide continued to rise steeply, reaching over 255,000 in 2001. Filipinos are now the largest national group in the industry, making up 28.1 per cent, and the US\$2 billion they send home each year is nearly 30 per cent of all official remittances from overseas Filipino workers.

Yet, despite the importance of their numbers and their economic contribution, Filipino seafarers remain low on the occupational ladder. By 2000, only 15 per cent were officers.

The image of “Filipino-ness”

Filipinos and their national government have tried hard to differentiate Filipino seafarers from other nationalities, says McKay.

The state recognises and celebrates the role of overseas workers, including seafarers, as Bagong Bayani or “new heroes” of the nation,

and seafarers have been acknowledged in National Seafarers’ Day since 1995.

The state and the migration industry shape an image of “Filipino-ness” to reinforce the role of overseas workers and continue the flow of much-needed remittances, he says. For seafarers, the emphasis is on traditional Filipino “family values” and male sex roles. At the same time, to play down a more aggressive masculinity, the state stresses sacrifice, delayed gratification, and the ability to get along without complaint.

Meanwhile, Filipino seafarers themselves go beyond the constraints of this image, forging their own identities to make sense of their secondary status on board and in the labour market.

Writing their own narratives

The Filipinos interviewed generally resisted their construction as subservient or pliable. Instead they expressed a pride in their work, emphasising their experience, ingenuity and improvisation.

One engineer stressed the superiority of their hands-on skills: “When I was on board I had a chief mate who was a foreigner [German]. When



we were doing trouble-shooting he handles a book and gives instructions on what he reads. The Filipinos are laughing at him, because the problem is so simple and he consulted a book... They rely too much on books but they don't hold tools."

Most respondents highlighted the benefits that seafaring brought them back home. One seafarer noted: "We are called Bagong Bayani because we sacrifice, we think of other people. And we are happy helping our family. We also help the government because of the remittances that we provide for the country."

But while many welcomed public acknowledgement, some took a jaundiced view of the state's use of heroic language. One seafarer noted: "...the government does not help us... They just flatter the seafarer and project us as valuable to other people."

Nevertheless, seafarers interviewed took advantage of the images of the "heroic" seafarer as seasoned adventurer, sexually experienced, provider and patron, father and husband to boost their status.

One said: "People in the neighbourhood in the province tend to idolise you because you always have many stories to tell, about certain

experiences, women, etc... For example, surviving a storm in the middle of a sea is a big thrill which you can share with other people."

Their material wellbeing also enhanced their standing. One boasted: "I am proud because seafaring enabled me to build a house, buy a vehicle and buy all the things for inside the house."

Seafaring also makes men a good marriage match. A young married second officer stated: "Women nowadays look for security and they know that, with seafarers, they are already secure."

These interviews found that Filipino seafarers had constructed meanings around their work that challenged the Philippine state's promotion of them as symbolic yet subordinate "new heroes", says McKay.

However, while these tactics helped them endure their subordinate positions, they did not directly challenge the exploitative relations and blatant racism on board or in the labour market.

"Filipino Sea Men: Constructing Masculinities in an Ethnic Labour Niche" by Steven C McKay appeared in the Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (vol. 33 no. 2, May 2007: 617-633).

"We are happy helping our family. We also help the government because of the remittances that we provide for the country."

Are we seafarers or slaves?

Some workers at sea are enduring slave conditions, as NORRIE McVICAR, ITF Coordinator in Scotland, discovered.

The case of the fishing vessel *Enxembre* recently berthed in Ullapool, Scotland, bears all the hallmarks of seafarers employed in line with the definition given by the International Labour Organization (ILO) for slavery – “forced and compulsory labour”.

Six Indonesian fishers joined the Spanish-owned, UK-flag *Atalaya*, with a Chilean master, in October 2006 after paying their agent in Jakarta US\$500 to get a job. While this practice is common in Indonesia, it is in clear breach of the 1996 ILO Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers Convention (C179), which, sadly, the UK government has still not ratified.

The crew signed a contract of employment in Indonesia, but never saw it again as the agent refused to give them a copy. However, they did see it long enough to note that they were to be paid €800 per month for an 18-month contract, which was the incentive to join the vessel in Spain. But, for the next 10 months, they were each paid only €241 a month (about US\$320).

In July 2007, the crew were told that the *Atalaya* had been sold to a new owner, UK-based Elcon Leisure, renamed *Enxembre*, and registered under the St Kitts and Nevis flag. At this point, the crew feared the worst. When they sought further information, they were told they would have to stay on the ship or pay

their own fares home and those of their replacements, as they would be in breach of their contracts.

When the *Enxembre* crew were in Ullapool in August 2007, the ITF investigated their claims and asked the local agents and the company for the wage accounts and copies of the employment contracts. Our request also fell on deaf ears.

The crew told the ITF that they worked on average 20 hours per day when fishing, with only two hours’ sleep on occasion and four hours’ rest at most. Their fishing trips lasted for three months, with only a few days’ rest in port in between. No records of hours were kept.

The chief engineer also said that he had monthly deductions from his wages, amounting to US\$1,450 over 23 months, for “company insurance”. This had not been agreed in his contract.

On 16 August, the agent tried to force the crew into a taxi to take them to the airport without any money or settlement of wages. The shipowners also placed three Portuguese seafarers on board the vessel with the intention of sailing it to Spain, with or without the current crew.

Because of the company’s and agent’s actions and intimidation, we assisted the crew in the arrest of the vessel on 17 August. The shipowners still denied responsibility for the crew’s wages and repatriation costs. However, on 29 August the owners finally lodged US\$75,000 into a joint

ITF/shipowner’s lawyers account, allowing the arrest of the vessel to be lifted and negotiations on the seafarers’ claims to go ahead.

The *Enxembre* left Ullapool for Vigo, Spain, and the owner arranged accommodation and the repatriation of the crew at no cost to them.

While I was in Ullapool dealing with the *Enxembre* crew’s complaints, I was approached by a further three Indonesians from a British flag vessel, the *Atlantic E*, with reports of similar conditions. The difference here was that the crew had actually signed a contract to be paid US\$315 per month “consolidated”.

One of the seafarers from the *Atlantic E* was repatriated to Indonesia after completing only two months’ work on the vessel, as he was unfit to work for 20 hours per day. As he had failed to complete his 18-month contract, he was being charged for his airfare and that of his replacement. He had also paid the agent US\$600 to get the job.

The most sickening thing about this story is that modern-day slavery is being carried out in European waters under the noses of the European Union’s Fisheries Commission.

The commission is responsible for the licensing of fishing vessels. This covers the size of vessel, engine capacity, size of the fishing net, size of the catch, and technical equipment – but nowhere is there any evidence of support for the human and trade union rights of the seafarers or fishers, or any attempt by the EU to stamp out forced or compulsory labour practices in line with ILO principles.



The crew of the Enxembre in Ullapool after the ITF secured back pay for them.

“The crew told the ITF that they worked on average 20 hours per day when fishing, with only two hours’ sleep on occasion and four hours’ rest at most.”



ITF Inspectors

Contact one of our Inspectors if you need help and you work on either a flag of convenience ship or on a foreign-flag ship not covered by a union agreement. If an Inspector is not available, contact the Actions Unit at ITF head office or your nearest ITF office (see left).

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Puerto Rico

See separate listing for Puerto Rico

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA



BAHAMAS



BARBADOS



BELIZE



BERMUDA



BOLIVIA



BURMA/MYANMAR



CAMBODIA



CAYMAN ISLANDS



COMOROS



CYPRUS



EQUATORIAL GUINEA



FRANCE (second register)



GEORGIA



GERMANY (second register)



GIBRALTAR



HONDURAS



JAMAICA



LEBANON



LIBERIA



MALTA



MARSHALL ISLANDS



NO PLACE TO HIDE.

Flags of convenience



MAURITIUS



MONGOLIA



NETHERLANDS ANTILLES



NORTH KOREA



PANAMA



SÃO TOMÉ & PRÍNCIPE



SRI LANKA



ST. VINCENT & THE GRENADINES



TONGA



VANUATU



These are the maritime flags that the International Transport Workers' Federation has declared **FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE**

In addition to these flags, there are certain shipping registers whose vessels can be regarded, on a ship by ship basis, as operating under a flag of convenience.
ITF HOUSE, 49-60 BOROUG ROAD, LONDON SE1 1DR TEL: +44 (0)20 7403 2733 FAX: +44 (0)20 7357 7871 EMAIL: MAIL@ITF.ORG.UK INTERNET: WWW.ITFGLOBAL.ORG

World fleet

Top 35 flag fleets

(ranked by tonnage, as at 1 January 2007)

	No. of ships (over 100gt)	Gross tonnage (millions)	GT (m) 1 January 2006	Average age (ships)
1 Panama*	7,183	155.0	141.8	18
2 Liberia*	1,907	68.4	59.6	12
3 Bahamas*	1,402	40.8	38.4	15
4 Marshall Islands*	853	32.8	29.2	10
5 Hong Kong (China)	1,179	32.7	29.8	12
6 Singapore	2,079	32.2	31.0	11
7 Greece	1,455	32.0	30.1	23
8 Malta*	1,294	24.8	23.0	17
9 China	3,695	23.5	22.2	23
10 Cyprus*	971	19.0	19.0	14
11 Norway (NIS second register)	617	14.8	14.2	16
12 Japan	6,731	12.8	12.8	15
13 Italy	1,566	12.6	11.6	22
14 United Kingdom	1,598	12.1	11.2	20
15 Germany	894	11.4	11.5	21
16 United States	6,437	11.1	11.0	26
17 South Korea	2,820	10.5	9.3	25
18 Isle of Man (United Kingdom)	360	8.6	8.4	9
19 Bermuda* (United Kingdom)	136	8.4	7.3	13
20 India	1,181	8.4	8.1	19
21 Denmark (DIS second register)	421	8.2	7.8	17
22 Russia	3,656	8.0	8.3	23
23 Antigua and Barbuda*	1,086	7.9	7.2	11
24 Malaysia	1,101	6.4	5.6	16
25 St Vincent*	1,064	6.1	5.9	25
26 Netherlands	1,258	5.8	5.7	17
27 Iran	475	5.2	5.3	22
28 Philippines	1,840	5.1	5.2	29
29 Turkey	1,184	4.8	5.0	25
30 Indonesia	4,271	4.3	4.3	22
31 Sweden	564	3.9	3.8	32
32 Norway	1,461	3.4	3.3	26
33 Cayman Islands* (United Kingdom)	157	2.9	2.8	15
34 Thailand	789	2.9	3.0	25
35 Taiwan	628	2.8	3.2	25
World total	94,936	721.9	675.1	22

Source: Lloyd's Register of Shipping. * Denotes flag of convenience.

Top 35 shipowning countries

(ranked by tonnage, as at 1 January 2007)

	No. of ships (over 1,000gt)	Gross tonnage (millions)	Average age (ships)
1 Greece	3,084	100.6	17
2 Japan	3,330	99.8	9
3 Germany	2,965	62.1	8
4 China	3,184	44.9	20
5 United States	1,763	39.1	18
6 Norway	1,810	34.6	16
7 Hong Kong (China)	689	27.7	13
8 South Korea	1,041	20.9	17
9 United Kingdom	856	20.1	14
10 Denmark	783	17.1	12
11 Taiwan	574	16.5	13
12 Singapore	794	15.8	15
13 Russia	2,157	14.0	23
14 Italy	739	13.2	16
15 Switzerland	370	10.7	15
16 India	456	8.8	18
17 Belgium	226	7.4	14
18 Turkey	874	7.1	19
19 Saudi Arabia	150	6.7	16
20 Netherlands	739	6.5	13
21 Sweden	346	6.4	15
22 Malaysia	357	6.2	16
23 France	309	5.8	11
24 Iran	184	5.8	16
25 United Arab Emirates	366	5.0	22
26 Indonesia	793	5.0	23
27 Canada	340	4.6	25
28 Spain	349	3.5	18
29 Kuwait	68	3.1	18
30 Brazil	151	2.9	21
31 Croatia	110	2.7	37
32 Australia	85	2.5	16
33 Philippines	256	2.2	24
34 Ukraine	445	2.2	25
35 Thailand	298	1.9	23
World total	39,209	703.3	22

Source: Lloyd's Register of Shipping.



Getting organised

How do you set up a union in uncharted waters? MARK DAVIS of the ITF International Seafarer Union Development Programme reports on how the ITF helped to get seafarers' unions started in four previously unorganised countries. Overleaf, AHMET DEMIRSAR explains in detail how it was done in Turkey.

Trade unions are essential to protect workers in the maritime industry – now, probably even more than ever before. The ITF has put “organising globally” at the heart of its work. But how do you get a seafarers’ union started where none has existed before?

There is no universal formula to the successful development of a new trade union organisation. Every country has its unique national legal frameworks and political circumstances. But there is a common approach (see box overleaf), which has emerged in the ITF International Seafarer Union Development Programme (ISUDP) success in the establishment of new maritime affiliates in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Turkey.

Malaysia

In 1997, there were around 10,000 Malaysian seafarers, but no seafarers’ union – despite poor wages and working conditions on Malaysian-flagged ships. However, there was a good basis for organising. There was a functioning ITF affiliates’ coordinating committee, political influence in the national trade union centre, the MTUC, and some ITF affiliates willing to help set up a seafarers’ union.

With the support of the MTUC and the Transport Workers’ Union of Peninsular Malaysia and the Port Kelang Harbour Workers’

Union, the National Union of Seafarers of Peninsular Malaysia (MSU) was registered by the end of 1997. The MSU is a rare example of a national union in a country where trade unions are enterprise-based by law.

The union, affiliated to the ITF in 2003, now



“There is a common approach which has emerged in the establishment of new maritime affiliates in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste and Turkey.”

Above: Outdoor campaigning by Dad-Der union activists in Turkey.

The first steps...

- Define who does what globally and nationally, and coordinate the organising project to fill the gaps in resources, formulate education, organise initiatives and ensure successful delivery. The role of national trade union organisations depends upon their capacity and willingness to commit resources to the project.
- Ensure there are trained national trade union activists to be organisers and educators.
- Be aware of other relevant, beneficial national, sub-regional or regional education initiatives to tap into.
- Establish enduring trade union partnerships or mentoring relationships with appropriate sector unions to ensure the new union continues to develop positively.

“There had never been a dedicated seafarers’ union in Sri Lanka – despite a seagoing workforce of 14,000, a heavily unionised waterfront, and significant shipboard exploitation.”



organises around 800 seafarers, and has a full-time Organising Secretary, Rafiq Ramoo. Rafiq has been at the forefront of solidarity in Malaysia for the ITF campaign against flag of convenience (FOC) vessels, and has recently been trained as an ITF FOC Inspector. The MSU now has a unique partnership with the Malaysian Marine Department, which means that ship disputes can be pursued to satisfactory conclusions.

The project to set up the new union was funded by the ITF, and the MSU was hoped to be fully financially self-sufficient by the end of 2007.

Sri Lanka

As in Malaysia, there had never been a dedicated seafarers’ union in Sri Lanka – despite a seagoing workforce of 14,000, a heavily unionised waterfront, and significant shipboard exploitation. Previous ITF efforts to integrate a seafarers’ section within a general union had been unsuccessful.

In October 2005, the ITF affiliate JSS offered to organise a seafarers’ union. As the JSS already organised dockers, its port worker members had security clearance to enter ports and visit ships – and Ranjan Perera, an ex-seafarer activist member, took on the organising assignment.

Three union development seminars were held for rank and file seafarers and potential union executive members during 2006. Participants were clear that they wanted a stand-alone seafarers’ union, rather than a seafarers’ section in a multi-sector union. The JSS respected this desire, and a working committee duly drafted a constitution. The National Union of Seafarers Sri Lanka (NUSS) was registered in 2006.

The NUSS was accepted as an ITF affiliate in April 2007 and now has around 1,000 members, with the JSS continuing to play a mentoring role. Ranjan Perera has now also undertaken ITF Inspector training.

Timor Leste

When East Timor became independent from Indonesia in 2000, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) saw that a maritime union was a priority. Before independence, the resource-rich Timor Sea oil/gas industry was regulated to ensure exclusive participation for Indonesian East Timor and Australia. But the industry was deregulated by the Australian government. The MUA realised that an organisation for offshore workers in the newly independent Timor Leste would be a valuable northern partner to pursue

re-regulation of the zone, to promote training and jobs and, importantly, to press for a fair share of the oil/gas revenue to accelerate the new country’s development.

The MUA put activist organiser Mick Killick in Dili in 2002, and the ISUDP coordinated the MUA/ITF project to establish a maritime union. In 2003, with the assistance of the national trade union centre KSTL, the Uniaun Maritime no Transporte Timor Lorosa’e (UMTTL) had its inaugural congress. It affiliated to the ITF in 2004 with around 80 members.

In 2004-05, the International Labour Organization provided funding to consolidate the UMTTL. Since 2005, the Swedish national centres LO/TCO have financed the expansion of the union under the challenging circumstances of civil unrest, and are continuing funding until 2009.

Under the stewardship of Secretary Paulino da Costa, the UMTTL membership has risen to 350. Following the tragic deaths of several UMTTL members on the Dili waterfront, the union held a seminar in July 2007 on occupational safety and health for dockers, with specialist input from the Indonesian ITF affiliate, the Trade Union of Jakarta International Container Terminal (SPJICT). The UMTTL can now turn to both the SPJICT and the MUA for solidarity and support as it gets organised.

Turkey

With more than 1,000 Turkish-flagged ships and 60,000 seafarers in a largely privatised maritime industry, it was surprising that Turkey had no seafarers’ trade union.

However, change began in 2001 when maritime university lecturers and a large team of private sector seafarer trade union activists met the ITF with the intention of creating a representative body. In April 2002, the ITF agreed that Swedish seafarer affiliate Seko would sponsor the establishment of the Turkish seafarers’ contact centre in Istanbul as a vehicle to develop trade union organisation.

The contact centre provided education and organising initiatives, which led to the call to include trade union education in the professional nautical curriculum, and the setting up of Dad-Der (Marine Employees’ Solidarity Association).

Dad-Der affiliated to the ITF in 2006. Intensive teamwork during 2006-07 led to collective bargaining agreements for more than 80 ships and 1,500 seafarers, as well as a network providing solidarity and assistance for seafarers in dispute in Turkish ports. Seko retains an important advisory and political support role for the new union.



Union training for activists and members has been a key component in the success story of the Dad-Der Turkish seafarers' union.

From dreams to reality

We established Dad-Der in 2004, one year after a change in Turkish law enabled us to get organised and function as an association, and we gained ITF membership in 2006. However we have been involved in the work of building solidarity among Turkish seafarers for around 10 years.

We began as 16 very close friends who had met while studying at the maritime universities. We dreamed of forming a union for seafarers. But, following the military coup d'état of 1980, the law became a great obstacle to unions, and the formation of new unions was particularly restricted.

Now we have more than 1,800 members. At least 400 of them are activists. They correspond with us permanently, get information about the actual situation, inform us about the situation on their vessels and get instructions on what to do and how to do it. They find new members for our organisation, and they make claims about shipowners to us.

Our key strengths are our volunteers and frontline activists, who have worked for us for so many years. Our leadership, which we call "the team", is devoted to our cause, young and energetic (the oldest of us is 38). We have substantial experience of the sea, we are well-educated and each of us has a strong network of contacts in the sector.

We are struggling to improve the position of seafarers in every way we can. We carry out training to improve awareness among workers about their rights and about the international labour movement. We are training as many activists as we can in order to improve our support, and power. The key here is to get young seafarers to be patient enough to act in the correct manner as a part of the big picture, while making sure that patience does not bury the fire in their hearts. I believe we are indeed lucky to have young activists among the university lecturers, without whom it would be impossible to achieve this.

Everybody who works for the union is involved in almost every job, but we have been re-organising to become more professional in our operation. Our duties are divided into four

AHMET DEMIRSAR, General Secretary of Dad-Der, the Marine Employees' Solidarity Association of Turkey, explains how volunteers have nurtured Turkey's young maritime union from a dream among friends into a force for solidarity.

"Our key strengths are our volunteers and frontline activists, who have worked for us for so many years."

main areas: management, agreements, training and inspectorate.

From November 2006 to September 2007, our agreements unit secured about 90 agreements. In that period we have managed to decrease cases of double book-keeping by 20 per cent, and wages have risen approximately 70 per cent for ratings and 30 per cent for officers on the 90 vessels under agreement.

We are now building up a Dad-Der/ITF national agreement, which will be an important step forward for us. We hope it will help us to improve the rights of Turkish seafarers working on board flag of convenience vessels, by gaining a more systematic approach to solving the problems that regularly arise.

Our training team is carrying out a series of

programmes. In 2007, these included monthly indoor training for activists; two outdoor seminars for seafarers; an on-board training programme for vessels under agreement; a 30-minute briefing on ILO regulations for port authorities in the Marmara region; and a seminar for owners' representatives on the new national agreement.

One of our colleagues (a chief engineer) coordinates our team of local inspectors and a group of activists. The Black Sea region is problematic in terms of substandard shipping, and the inspectorate team spends most of its time focused on strikes and claims for unpaid wages. From January to August 2007, it collected more than US\$800,000 in back pay.

We ensure that our members are informed about the situation on board a vessel before signing the contract, as well as about the situation of each owner, and that they will be protected against an owner's unlawful actions when working on board. More generally, we believe that, because of the work of the union, wages and the conditions are getting better, and not only on the vessels under agreement.

We do not provide any welfare services at the moment, but in the first quarter of 2008 we are planning to open a small café with internet facilities in the Tuzla region, where seafarers' welfare facilities are urgently needed.

The key thing we need to do now is to get more of our volunteers on to a professional footing. Currently we pay only five union officers.

It was easier at the beginning to carry on the job with volunteers; expectations were so low that anything achieved was a great success in comparison to absolute zero. Now we do need to succeed in professionalising our organisation without losing the passion of our volunteers.



International Transport Workers' Federation

**Do you need help?
If so, send us this fax...**

To: ITF Actions Unit (fax: +44 20 7940 9285 or +44 20 7357 7871)
Re: Seafarer request for assistance

Your details

Your name (will be treated in confidence)

Your contact number(s)

Your position on board (for example, AB)

Your nationality

Details of the ship

Ship name

Type of ship

Flag

IMO number

Current location of the ship

Next port of call + ETA

Number of crew /
nationalities

Type of cargo /
quantity on board

Name of shipowner /
operator

What is the problem?

Describe the problem (giving as much detail as possible)

How long have you been experiencing this problem?

Are there others experiencing similar problems on board? (Please give details)

How long have you been on board this ship?

What kind of help are you looking for? (for example, recovery of wages, repatriation etc)



Look carefully before you sign: ITF advice on your contract to work at sea

The best guarantee of proper conditions of employment at sea is only to sign a contract drawn up in accordance with an ITF-approved collective agreement. Failing that, here is a checklist to follow.

-  Don't start work on a ship without having a written contract.
-  Never sign a blank contract, or a contract that binds you to any terms and conditions that are not specified or that you are not familiar with.
-  Check if the contract you are signing refers to a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). If so, make sure that you are fully aware of the terms of that CBA, and keep a copy of it along with your contract.
-  Make sure that the duration of the contract is clearly stated.
-  Don't sign a contract that allows for alterations to be made to the contractual period at the sole discretion of the shipowner. Any change to the agreed duration of the contract should be by mutual consent.
-  Always ensure that the contract clearly states the basic wages payable and make sure that the basic working hours are clearly defined (for example 40, 44 or 48 per week). The International Labour Organization states that basic working hours should be a maximum of 48 per week (208 per month).
-  Make sure that the contract clearly stipulates how overtime will be paid and at what rate. There could be a flat hourly rate payable for all hours worked in excess of the basic. Or there may be a monthly fixed amount for a guaranteed number of overtime hours, in which case the rate for any hours worked beyond the guaranteed overtime should be clearly stated. The ILO states that all overtime hours should be paid at a minimum of 1.25 x the normal hourly rate.
-  Make sure that the contract clearly states how many days paid leave per month you will get. The ILO states that paid leave should not be less than 30 days per year (2.5 days per calendar month).
-  Make certain that the payments for basic wages, overtime and leave are clearly and separately itemised in the contract.
-  Never sign a contract that contains any clause stating that you are responsible for paying any portion of your joining or repatriation expenses.
-  Don't sign a contract that allows the shipowner to withhold or retain any portion of your wages during the period of the contract. You should be entitled to full payment of wages earned at the end of each calendar month.
-  Don't sign a contract that contains any clause that restricts your right to join, contact, consult with or be represented by a trade union of your choice.
-  Be aware that an individual employment contract will not always include details of additional benefits. Therefore you should try to obtain confirmation (preferably in the form of a written agreement or contractual entitlement) of what compensation will be payable in the event of:
 - Sickness or injury during the contractual period
 - Death (amount payable to the next of kin)
 - Loss of the vessel
 - Loss of personal effects resulting from the loss of the vessel
 - Premature termination of the contract.
-  Ensure that you are given and retain a copy of the contract you have signed.
-  Remember... whatever the terms and conditions, any contract/agreement that you enter into voluntarily would, in most jurisdictions, be considered legally binding.

In February 2006, the maritime world greeted the historic adoption of a single International Labour Organization convention, encompassing virtually all the minimum standards required to ensure satisfactory conditions of employment for the world's seafarers. Here at last was a plainly written "bill of rights" for seafarers, bringing together and updating more than 54 international standards, while introducing a system of certification and inspection to enforce it. It also contains a simplified amendment procedure for the technical parts of the convention, which means that it will be easier to amend and thus to keep up with developments.

Like any ILO convention, however, the Consolidated Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) cannot be implemented immediately, but must wait for the requisite number of ratifications by signatory states – in this case at least 30 countries, who must control between them at least 33 per cent of the world's tonnage.

By September 2007, only Liberia and the Marshall Islands, flag of convenience states controlling more than 10 per cent of the world's tonnage, had ratified, though many other countries were well advanced in their preparations. Members of the European Parliament voted in March to press European Union countries for 2008 as a target ratification date, though this is far from assured.

The ILO social partners, representing governments, employers and trade unions led by the ITF, have kept up the momentum to ensure ratification happens as quickly as possible and that the opportunity to create a new, "indispensable component of quality shipping", as the ILO Labour Standards Director Cleopatra Doumbia Henry has put it, is not lost. They have undertaken a series of "high level" missions to key maritime nations, as well as regional seminars organised by interested states, and have been engaged in committed discussions with senior figures from government and industry in each case.

Once the requisite number of ratifications has been secured, there will be no "more favourable treatment" for ships whose countries have not ratified the convention. Ships of all countries, irrespective of ratification, will be subject to inspection in the ports of any country that has ratified, and to possible detention if they are deemed not to have met the standards set.

In parallel with the ratification process among individual states, the ITF and its European wing, the ETF, have been negotiating with the European Community Shipowners'

Pushing for ratification

Trade unions are among those working hard to ensure the groundbreaking Maritime Labour Convention – the 'seafarers' bill of rights' – fulfils its potential to improve the lives of seafarers worldwide, as KAY PARRIS reports.

Association (ECSA) in an attempt to reach agreement on the implementation of key aspects of the convention not already covered by existing European Union instruments across the EU. Any agreement reached in this way would be enshrined in an EU directive, giving it legal force across Europe, even in ports where member states have not individually ratified it.

Potential for change

The high profile of these efforts to bring the convention to a stage when it can be meaningfully implemented reflects the perception of every proper stakeholder in the maritime world that this convention has extraordinary potential to change the shipping industry for the better.

ILO Director-General Juan Somavía hailed

the convention "a landmark development in the world of work". Dierk Lindemann of the ECSA commented: "This will fill the gap in international regulations on labour conditions. Labour considerations are essential."

To Efthimios E Mitropoulos, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, the convention elevates the human element to the "fourth pillar" of the regulatory regime for international shipping, alongside the three key IMO conventions that cover safety, training and professional standards, and environmental concerns*.

Under the certification system, shipowners will be required to produce a "Maritime Labour Certificate" and a "Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance" authorised by the flag state. The latter must outline the shipowners'

Key provisions of the new convention

- An employment agreement, guaranteeing decent on-board working and living conditions, to be signed by both the seafarer and the shipowner, or a representative of the shipowner.
- Monthly pay, in full and in accordance with the employment agreement and any applicable collective agreement.
- 14-hour work limit in any 24-hour period, 72 hours in any seven day period.
- Shipowner must pay to repatriate seafarer in case of illness, injury, shipwreck, insolvency, sale of ship etc.
- Specific requirements for living accommodation and recreational facilities – including minimum room sizes, and satisfactory heating, ventilation, sanitary facilities, lighting and hospital accommodation.
- Access to prompt medical care when on board and in port.
- Measures for effective enforcement and compliance include a certification system for labour standards. A Maritime Labour Certificate and Declaration of Maritime Labour Compliance must be issued by the flag state and must be available on board for any port state inspection.



The Maritime Labour Convention will require seafarers to be covered by an employment agreement guaranteeing decent working conditions.

plans for ensuring that applicable national regulations necessary to carry out the provisions of the convention will be adhered to during the voyage. This means masters will have to keep records to prove that they are complying with the convention on an ongoing basis. There will also be onboard and onshore complaint procedures to encourage the rapid resolution of problems.

Brian Orrell, General Secretary of the British union Nautilus UK and Chair of the ITF Seafarers' Section, was the first to hail the convention as a "seafarers' bill of rights".

He commented: "We want seafarers to understand their rights, see how they will be delivered, and see that if they aren't delivered, they have a right to redress. We are talking about the right to be paid regularly, the right to be repatriated when necessary, the right to proper leave and access to communications, and the right to complain."

European dimension

Following the latest round of negotiations with ECSA over the wording of a possible EU agreement, Brian Orrell reported that both parties had now committed themselves to work towards a central agreement, containing key aspects of the Maritime Labour Convention, which would subsequently form the text of an EU directive.

An EU Directive would give the provisions of the Convention extra "teeth" in Europe, particularly where member states had failed to ratify, though the trade union lobby is anxious to ensure that the EU directive does not come into force until the convention itself has

received enough ratifications to enter into force.

Orrell explains: "The member states may feel they have done enough through having an EU Directive they have to comply with and may feel they don't need to ratify the convention. In many EU countries, however, the majority of seafarers are employed on foreign flags, which would not be covered by the directive."

Still, Orrell believes the process of agreeing a text for a future directive will significantly strengthen the uptake and enforcement of key parts of the convention in Europe. Apart from anything else, he says: "It sends a clear signal to EU member states that the social partners want these clauses in place."

Progress towards ratification

In the meantime, the focus for all stakeholders has to be on the need for ratification of the convention itself. One key impetus behind the convention was to overcome the difficulties governments faced in ratifying and enforcing existing detailed maritime instruments. The new convention sets out to achieve this by setting out the basic rights of seafarers, while allowing ratifying countries flexibility in their approach to implementing these global standards for decent work within their national laws.

Of course, this leaves many challenges for the legal systems of the ratifying countries still to be overcome. Before the ship sets sail, for example, it will need to be issued with a national certificate declaring its compliance with minimum standards for seafarers' payment, accommodation, rest facilities and

other criteria. Which body would be authorised by the flag state to issue this certificate? And which bodies in the port state would be authorised to carry out inspections?

States embarking on the ratification process have a host of legal challenges to work out. The social partners are determined to provide support and encouragement, particularly to those states with major shipping fleets. To that end, ITF maritime representatives have participated in delegations on missions to key countries, including the Philippines, Panama and Russia, as well as attending regional seminars in Japan, Argentina and Bulgaria.

The missions are ongoing and have been largely successful so far, with governments in every country demonstrating their willingness to implement the necessary legal changes.

Maintaining momentum

One of the first missions, in February 2007, was to Panama, the largest flag state with a registry of 7,000 vessels. Following the mission, the government promised to implement a plan of action involving legal, administrative and operational changes in order to secure rapid ratification in the country. The ILO pledged its help in offering technical assistance with establishing norms and "creating mechanisms for consultation and training". But it was clear that the Panamanians were already motivated to get behind the convention.

ITF Americas Secretary Antonio Fritz, who participated in the mission, observed that motivation came not only from Panama's interests as the world's biggest registry but also because seafarers' unions in the country saw its potential to boost seafaring employment by levelling out the labour standards playing field.

"The maritime industry needs to agree a common position in order to avoid unfair competition," Fritz commented. "Labour issues are usually the main cost-reducing targets, quite often sacrificing safety, but the Panamanian authorities seem to have understood that the system that has been used to exploit seafarers will now certainly change.

"Panamanian seafarers' unions see the MLC as an opportunity to increase the number of Panamanian seafarers on board Panamanian flagged vessels, a situation that has not been promoted by the maritime authority in the past."

The question of how the convention could affect the economics of labour supply is now looming large in the world's biggest labour

“Our argument was that, while ships will still want people from the Philippines, if they haven't ratified once the convention is in force, shipowners will have to ensure that the seafarers on their ships have been recruited in accordance with the convention.”



Pushing for ratification

supply country – the Philippines. This may not be the most obvious effect of the convention, which is primarily designed to root out unscrupulous shipowners and charterers and protect the seafarers they employ.

As part of the ILO mission to the Philippines, however, Brian Orrell was able to help clarify what the enforcement of minimum labour standards could mean for a country without rival as a supplier of seafarers to the global industry.

Orrell explained: “Our argument was that, while ships will still want people from the Philippines, if they haven't ratified once the convention is in force, shipowners will have to ensure that the seafarers on their ships have been recruited in accordance with the convention.

“The onus is on the flag state to issue a certificate and they will have to be satisfied that procedures have been properly carried out. They may well get to the stage where they feel it is simply easier to go to another country which has ratified, where mechanisms are in place to help ensure procedures are carried out in compliance with the MLC, and then the Philippines could find it is starting to lose its position.”

The Philippines showed clear commitment to the ILO process by ensuring that every transport department engaged with the mission delegates. The mission left the government in a much stronger position to resist the lobbying of domestic shipowners, who were concerned that their fleets would not be able to meet the new standards demanded by the convention.

Orrell said: “In fact, we were able to explain that the convention relates mainly to international voyages (though some in the archipelago would be included) and that much of the domestic fleet, including wooden vessels, would be excluded. This eliminated a major obstacle.”

Russian mission

In Russia, the ILO delegation picked up clear signals of political commitment to ratification during its top level meetings with government representatives, including the secretary of state for transport, the director of the Department of International Cooperation and Public Relations and an adviser from the Office of the President. However, implementation presents a host of challenges, which could take up to five years to be overcome.

An action plan has been adopted by the Ministry of Transport but throws up various political problems, including the need first to put in place structures to implement existing ILO conventions ratified by the country. In the case of Convention 179 (recruitment and placement) for example, no agency has been made responsible for overseeing the convention. This means compliance is voluntary and that the manning agencies are not being properly controlled – a situation that would need to be sorted out in order for the recruitment provisions of the MLC to be addressed. In this context it should be noted that the Russian Federation is an important flag state, port state and labour supply state.

It was clear that another challenge would lie in the considerable training requirements of the flag and port state inspection systems. Nonetheless, the Russian shipowners offered their support for the convention, and the elected lower house of the Federal Parliament (the State Duma) made its strong commitment clear. Following a meeting with the Duma's Committee on Labour and Social Policy, the committee members drafted a recommendation for rapid ratification and implementation of the MLC, to be forwarded to the Russian President.

The ITF's Jon Whitlow, who participated in the mission, said: “This was a useful and productive mission. It has opened a number of doors, which will help us to follow up on the Russian ratification, and the demonstration we were given about the steps the Russian Federation has taken to implement ILO Convention 185 (seafarers' identity documents) was most impressive.”

Trade unionists in many other globalised industries are watching the progress of the Maritime Labour Convention towards securing a rigorously fair and effective system of rules to protect a 1.2 million strong workforce handling 90 per cent of world trade. If the hopes of the social partners are realised, there may be much for all trade unions to learn from the nuts and bolts of implementing at the national levels such an ambitious global system that truly puts labour rights at the heart of the economic agenda.

**These are the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping Convention (STCW) and the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL).*

Kay Parris was until December 2007 the editor of the ITF magazine Transport International.

Lifelines for seafarers

Port-based welfare services can no longer meet changing needs as seafarers spend more time out at sea, says a new report for the ITF Seafarers' Trust.

Growing competition in the shipping industry means fast turnarounds, smaller crews and reduced shore leave – increasing pressures on seafarers yet restricting their access to the welfare services they need to cope.

This grim picture emerges from a year-long study by the Seafarers' International Research Centre at Cardiff University, prepared for the ITF Seafarers' Trust. "Port-based Welfare Services for Seafarers" (which can be downloaded at: www.itfglobal.org/seafarers-trust/welfare rpt.cfm) is based on 4,000 responses to a survey to find out the welfare needs of seafarers.

The study found that the traditional port-based welfare facilities (such as seafarers' centres) are now being by-passed as more seafarers spend longer at sea with less time in port to use them.

At the same time, the employers have failed to develop their own company-based welfare services to meet changing needs.

Welfare work and provision

The majority of seafarers – 72 per cent – said they had not seen a seafarers' welfare worker aboard their ship during their current contract, and few had seen a ship's visitor. Their

expectations and needs also went beyond current services. The majority, 82 per cent, responded positively to the idea of a mobile seafarers' centre with facilities such as email and a small shop coming near to the gangway.

The respondents worked for over 100 companies, with a range of policies that had created very fragmented welfare provision. The companies generally had a narrow sense of seafarers' welfare, mainly focused on limited entertainment facilities. But even this provision varied considerably. While one company provided a monthly US\$150 welfare fund per ship for DVDs, sports equipment etc, others took involuntary contributions to shipboard welfare funds from overtime pay or extra earnings.

The study's analysis of company policies, and interviews with owners and management company reps, pointed to: "a fine balance between the cost of welfare provisions and profit".

Facilities in port

Most seafarers appreciated seafarers' centres in port, but with the dangers of walking in port areas, and growing security, they wanted free transport to centres. The best seafarers' centres named by seafarers were ecumenical ones in UK ports and other parts of Western Europe and North America. The worst were those in the Black Sea and Indian sub-continent. Seafarers were increasingly using commercial centres, such as shops, karaoke and other seafarers' bars, particularly where they provided free transport.

Staying in touch

Most ratings are still not allowed to use email when at sea, missing out on a vital lifeline to family and friends. Only 16 per cent of seafarers said they had access to emails on board – as low as 3 per cent for the ratings. And even where they did have access, there were limits on the number and length of messages they could send, a lack of privacy and sometimes charges for incoming as well as outgoing emails. Although letters were the cheapest option, many said their limited time, and the time taken for mail, made letter-writing less attractive.

Shore leave is being squeezed by new working practices and inadequate transport provision, the ITF survey found.



Lifelines for seafarers



Interviews with company reps revealed that some preferred their crew to remain in ignorance of news from home rather than have instant access through emails on board. "The guy's going to worry about what's going on at home," said one.

Shore leave

Shore leave – so important for seafarers' physical and mental wellbeing – had suffered from the changing conditions in the industry. In the report, 64 per cent said they had not had it for some time, and 36 per cent of those who did get it said it lasted for only two hours on average.

The main reasons for lack of shore leave were workload while in port and fast turnarounds, but seafarers also lacked transport, information about the ports, and were restricted by the ISPS (International Ship and Port Facility Security) Code. The latter restriction was also mentioned by company reps, who were unanimous about the importance of shore leave for seafarers' welfare.

What seafarers want

Many seafarers said their welfare would be improved by: free transport to shore-based welfare facilities (including communication, shopping and a place of worship); ship visits by welfare workers; information about the ports where they call; a balance between the application of the ISPS Code and their welfare needs; and access to on-board email facilities.

ITF General Secretary David Cockroft, who is also the secretary of the ITF Seafarers' Trust, explains that the trust has "switched from funding for major building projects to an emphasis upon small, mobile work coupled with intensive ship visiting".

The trust was also aiming to improve welfare provision for as many seafarers as possible through projects encouraging communication facilities on board ship, and the freephone service of the International Seafarers' Assistance Network.

The full report (in English only) can be viewed at: www.itfglobal.org/seafarers-trust/welfarept.cfm

➔ **"It is important to have a seafarers' centre in port; besides anything else you can have facilities for a phone call. You will also have the chance of meeting with other people from other ships."**

➔ **"Only communication I use is via satellite phone which is very expensive. We have email on board but it is for the ship's business only – even as a chief officer I don't have access to it for personal use."**

➔ **"Shore leave is important because it is the only way for letting our stress out. We are like prisoners on board. We need to interact with other people and see different faces."**

➔ **"When we lash containers we get paid one dollar per container; every month 10 per cent of the lashing money goes to the ship's welfare fund."**

➔ **"Seafarers generally need counselling. Not every sailor, but the Filipino seafarers. It is part of our spiritual life."**

➔ **"We need people to visit us to relieve our isolation. Somebody coming to us and asking 'How are you? How's your life here? Are things OK?'"**

➔ **"... In many ports there are no phone boxes. Before the ISPS some vendors used to come in ports with mobile phones and charged a dollar per minute but nowadays you cannot see them ... Communication with families is very difficult for us, especially in the ports in which we are only staying for a couple of hours."**

➔ **"Very little things could improve our life at sea ... you cannot buy that happiness when you hear the voices of your family members."**



Crossing cultures

If you work in the maritime industry, you're probably meeting seafarers from other cultures and backgrounds all the time. Here are some facts, stories, words and other cultural snippets to give you a flavour of the seafaring traditions of some important maritime nations – China, the English speaking countries, the Philippines, Iceland and Russia. YASMIN PRABHUDAS reports.

China

China has a long seafaring tradition, going back 7,000 years. It reached its peak during the Ming Dynasty from 1368-1644. Today there are some half a million Chinese seafarers.

The legend of the Chinese seafaring hero Zheng He

Zheng He lived in the Ming Dynasty. His fleet comprised more than 300 ships, employing 27,000 seafarers and he is said to have voyaged to more than 30 countries and regions in Asia and Africa between 1405 and 1433. It is believed that the routes he took linked the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean, sailing as far west as the Persian Gulf and Madagascar. His voyages have been recorded 87 years earlier than Columbus' discovery of the Americas.

Some Chinese seafaring proverbs

- Raise your sail one foot and you get ten feet of wind
- Big ships often sail on big debts
- Don't build a new ship out of old wood
- The heart is but the beach beside the sea that is the world
- You can't load a small boat with heavy cargo.

Philippines

The Philippines is among the largest seafaring nations in the world with approximately 250,000 active Filipino seafarers working on all kinds of vessels. Although they only make up 15 per cent of Filipino overseas workers, they

bring in more dollars than any other group in the country.

Leisure

Filipino seafarers generally prefer:

- basketball over football
- billiards over snooker.

Filipino myth

Long ago, the earth, sea and sky were ruled by three different gods.

The sun god, who ruled the sky, had a beautiful daughter, Luna, the moon. One day she took a path that led her outside her kingdom. She wandered until she reached the place where the sky met the sea. As she admired the beautiful things around her, she was startled by a voice. It asked, "Where have you come from, most beautiful one?"

Turning around she saw a young man. He was smiling at her. She answered, "I am Luna, daughter of the sun god." The man answered, "I am Mar, the son of the sea god. Welcome to our kingdom." Soon the two became good friends. They had many interesting stories to tell each other. When it was time for Luna to go, they promised to see each other as often as they could. They continued to meet. Eventually, they fell in love.

One day, after one of their secret meetings, Luna went back to the heavens full of joy. She was so happy that she told her secret to one of her cousins. The cousin, jealous of her beauty and happiness, revealed the secret to the sun god. He was angry about his daughter's disobedience to the immortal laws. He locked

Crossing cultures

“Fishers at sea believe that each time Luna, the moon, appears, the sea gets troubled. ‘It’s Mar trying to escape from his cave,’ they say.”



her in the garden and sent a messenger to the sea god telling him that his son Mar had disobeyed the immortal law too. The sea god imprisoned his son in one of his sea caves.

Luna longed to be with Mar again. One day she managed to escape from the garden. She rushed to their meeting place. Mar saw her reflection on the water from inside the sea cave. His attempts to leave the cave caused the sea to become rough. Luna waited and waited but Mar did not come. She returned home very sad. She tried several times to see him again and went to the meeting place, but he never came.

Fishers at sea believe that each time Luna, the moon, appears, the sea gets troubled. “It’s Mar trying to escape from his cave,” they say.

Some common Filipino terms

apat = captain
hepe = chief
hepe kubierta = chief mate
hepe makinista = chief engineer
maestro amo = bosun
makina = engine
kubierta = deck
pabor = port
estrebor = starboard
tali = ropes
baldeyo = wash the deck/hold
kargada = cargo
kain = to eat
puerto = port/berth
kaibigan = friend
kabayan/kababayan = my countryman
kumusta = how are you?/hello
maalon = big waves/bad weather
walang sahod = no wages

walang pera = no money
yosi = cigarette
alak = spirit/wine/alcohol.

Iceland

Few traditions have a deeper impact on Icelanders than the annual Seafarers’ Day, a homage to the heroes of the seas, who generously supplied the foundation on which the country was built.

Seafarers’ Day in Iceland dates back to 1937, when the seafarers’ unions in the capital, Reykjavík, and neighbouring Hafnarfjörður founded the Seafarers’ Day Council. Its purpose was “to celebrate Iceland’s seafarers by dedicating them one day a year”. The first Seafarers’ Day was celebrated the following year, 1938, and has been held on the first Sunday in June ever since. It has become such an integral part of the society that it was made constitutional in 1987 and is one of only 11 “flag days” in Iceland.

On this day Icelanders pay tribute to the country’s founding industry. Festivities in towns and villages along the country’s coastline include an introduction to seafarers’ work and a tribute is paid to seafarers who have lost their lives at sea and to retired sailors and pioneers of the industry. On a lighter note, there are rowing contests, craft shows and songs and dance. All fishing vessels are in harbour on the day, as the seafarers join with friends, family and the community in the celebrations.

The Seafarers’ Day Council expanded its role in 1939. The board wanted to support seafarers in every possible way and found it worrying that, because of the strain of seafarers’ work, their occupational life was relatively short. “To lessen



the burden, the council embarked upon building and operating an old people's home in Reykjavík and the Home of Elderly Sailors was opened in 1957," says Gudmundur Hallvardsson, Chair of the Seafarers' Day Council. "Another home was opened in Hafnarfjörður in 1977. Around 700 people live in the DAS-homes, which are the frontrunners in care for the elderly in Iceland today."

Russia

Russia's seafaring tradition goes back to the time of Peter the Great in the late 17th century. Today there are more than 120,000 Russian seafarers.

Special Russian holidays

On 16 June, Russians celebrate Neptune Day. According to tradition, seafarers who cross the equator for the first time must be initiated. The beginner is made to bathe in the sea or others throw him into a swimming pool. The hapless seafarer must then crawl through a compartment on board a vessel that has been deliberately daubed with machine oil. Once he has undergone this ceremony, the seafarer receives the "Neptune" stamp and an initiation certificate. The next time he crosses the equator, he will be able to avoid this ritual, on presentation of the certificate!

Mercantile marine and inland water transport workers also hold a celebration on the first Sunday of July.

Toast to seafarers

It is common for Russians to make a toast to seafarers during an occasion. This usually happens after the main toast of the event.

Russian proverb

To drink beer without vodka is to throw money to the wind.

Some common Russian words and phrases

privet = hello
 Rossiia = Russia
 kak dela? = how are you?
 droog = friend
 do svidaniia = good bye
 kapitan = captain
 shef = chief
 port = port
 poidiom vypiem = let's go for a drink
 vodka = vodka/alcohol
 pivo = beer
 baksy = dollars.

Yasmin Prabhudas is the editor of the ITF Online news service.



Among English-speaking seafarers...

Seafarers' slang

Seafarers from English-speaking nations such as Australia, England, New Zealand and the US have developed a seafarers' slang, which includes some rhyming slang. Here are some examples:

- old man = captain
- Harry Tate = mate/deck officer
- ginger beer = engineer
- leckie = electrician
- sparky = radio officer
- babbling brook = cook
- crumb catcher = caterer/steward
- scalyback = AB/deck rating
- donkeyman = head of the engineroom ratings
- firemen = engineroom ratings
- channels = this describes the feelings that a seafarer has on days before they go on leave after being away for a while
- starboard list = a seafarer has one of these when he has had too much to drink (no prizes for guessing what the rhyme is!)
- pump the bilges = when you need to go to the toilet
- going ashore gear = the clothes you wear when you go ashore to socialise
- pit = a bunk or bed
- doebie = the laundry
- job and knock = when you are given the rest of the day off when you have finished a given task
- bell to bell = working normal rostered hours
- ringbolt = someone or something that is onboard the vessel that should not be there
- docking bottle = the declared bottle of spirits
- black pan = an evening meal that is usually

taken at around 10pm

- cowboy hitch = an incorrect or unrecognisably tied knot.

Sea shanties

These are songs that are sung by sailors to make working life a little easier. They are based on a "call and response" lyric and usually involve a whole team of seafarers.

The tradition developed out of the Anglo-Irish and African-Caribbean cultures. The songs evolved as the seafarers came into contact with other cultures so that Irish melodies mixed with African and Polynesian rhythms, which in turn blended in American stories.

The kind of shanty that was sung depended on the job that was being carried out. For example...

Short drag or short haul shanty – these were sung when seafarers were doing jobs that were quick, such as shortening or unfurling sails.

Long drag shanty – these were sung during heavier work that took a long time, like putting up a sail. The chorus at the end of each line enabled the seafarers to take a break between hauls.

Capstan shanty – these were used for long repetitive tasks that needed a sustained rhythm, for example, winding up the anchor chain when raising or lowering the anchor.

Forecastle shanty – this was sung in the evening when the work was done. Usually these focused on songs of love, adventure, battles or humour.

Whaling shanty – this was sung on board a whaler.

I was stupid not to ask the ITF for help

I am the former master of the *Captain Kharlamov* (former *Strelets*). The ITF came on board this vessel at Niigata, Japan, in the last days of June. I didn't participate in actions by my crew members – unfortunately, I believed the promises of the operator, Drakar Marine, and the owner, SVS Shipping & Trading.

The ship left Niigata on 30 June 2007, with insufficient quantity of diesel oil and very small supplies of food. But I decided to go to sea on the understanding that the financial situation of the owner was not good after the long stay at Niigata (25 days) due to serious deficiencies identified by the PSC (port state control) and afterwards the renaming and change of flag. I agreed with the owner, SV Strokulya, from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (though the company is registered in Belize), that the vessel would be bunkered in the South Kuril Islands or at Sakhalin because of the high prices of fuel and diesel oil in Japan.

When the ship arrived at the north-east extremity of Hokkaido, the shipowner proposed two options to me: – proceed further in the direction of the North Kuril Islands and receive diesel oil by barge; – proceed to Aniva Bay, Sakhalin Island, though this meant an extra 2.5 days of voyage time.

I refused the first option, considering it to be too risky – nobody allows a barge to go to sea in bad weather – and sailed instead to Aniva Bay for bunkering. In my opinion, the shipowner thought I would be too ashamed to make the longer trip. On 3 July, I sent the owner an application for signing me off at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, because of ill health.

Regarding the bunkering, I was proved right. The vessel met stormy weather in the approaches to the North Kuril Islands and had to seek shelter for 3.5 days. On arrival at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy on the evening of 13 July, the vessel had aboard 8mt of diesel oil from 15mt received at Aniva Bay and the voyage had lasted 14 days instead of the planned eight! We were short of provisions and fresh water.

On 14/15 July, there was a change of masters. All the shipowner's promises to

pay out the properly due wages to signing-off crew members at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy were ignored, notwithstanding the written undertakings of the operator. Nor were the contracts changed.

The owner had been phoning me frequently in Japan, but clearly now couldn't spare one minute to call me on arrival at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy. It seemed that, after changing the master, I no longer existed and he had completely forgotten about me and his promises about my salary. I had been recruited at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy in the course of a single day and there had been no time to perform all the formalities because the vessel was about to depart. In this situation, I agreed salary terms orally with the shipowner.

However, Drakar Marine sent me a contract for signing on arrival to Pohang, Korea. I was disappointed with it and decided not to sign it. I planned to discuss it with the owner after the return of the vessel to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy. But the voyage lasted three months instead of the planned one. All my attempts to meet with the owner to talk about the contract and salary met with no success.

I understand that the ITF can't help me in this situation because I was so stupid and didn't join my crew and ask for ITF help earlier. I realise now that all along we have not been dealing with an honest shipowner and operator.

Yours faithfully,

(Name withheld by the ITF)

Former master of the *Captain Kharlamov*

“I understand that the ITF can't help me in this situation... I realise now that all along we have not been dealing with an honest shipowner and operator.”

Some things just keep coming back! Many illnesses follow this pattern. One way or another we have to get along with them – by changing our behaviour, taking treatments or being prepared for another episode. Such conditions can have an effect on fitness to work at sea. Recurrence may impair our ability to meet the demands of the job.

A seafarer who has such a condition is likely to have his or her activities restricted by the doctor approved by a national maritime authority in one of several ways. If sudden collapse is a risk, then service at sea is likely to be prohibited. Often the risk diminishes as time goes by after an initial episode (eg some forms of heart disease). In this case, fitness to undertake duties which could cause vessel damage or loss in the event of collapse are likely to be prohibited permanently, or restricted for a longer period than other ones.

A great many conditions such as toothache, kidney or gall bladder stones, complications of a hernia or peptic ulcer develop over a period of a few hours. Work in distant waters is likely to be prohibited until the condition has been treated, but limited duties in coastal waters may still be possible. Common examples of such conditions include the following...

Seizures and loss of consciousness

An epileptic fit or seizure at sea can be a major risk to the person having it and can create severe difficulties for other crew members in looking after the person who has fainted and who may fit again.

In someone who has safety-critical duties it can put the vessel at risk. A previous fit is one of the main predictors of recurrence, although the risk is also increased after alcohol excess, head injury, stroke, surgery to the brain and with a few medications.

One common problem is when someone loses consciousness, nobody has witnessed it and no explanation is apparent. The cause may



Watch out for those repeat ailments

TIM CARTER, the medical adviser to the United Kingdom's Maritime and Coastguard Agency, looks at the way in which the risks posed by recurring conditions can be minimised through rigorous medical examinations, good treatment and effective preventive measures.

be a simple faint, a heart problem or a seizure.

Full clinical investigation is essential and, unless a clear and treatable cause can be found, a period away from work at sea is normally essential in case of recurrence.

Diabetes

Fitness for safety-critical work in anyone with diabetes is complex. The hormone insulin regulates the entry of glucose into the cells of the body. In diabetes there is a shortage of insulin and this means that the cells are effectively starved of an essential nutrient. This can cause both short-term and long-term problems. A severe shortage can start early in life, but many cases arise from relative shortages in middle age. The former almost always requires insulin replacement by injection. The latter can often be treated, at least initially, by diet and weight control – but this may need to be supplemented by tablets or insulin injections. Both diabetes itself and treatment with insulin can have complications.

In the short-term, severe untreated diabetics can become comatose over hours or days. Less acutely, the glucose which cannot be used by their cells is lost in their urine –

leading to frequency of urination and thirst. In the long-term, damage to blood vessels takes place – increasing the risk of heart and artery disease, gangrene of the toes and blindness.

Effective treatment can prevent the short-term problems and delay or reduce the severity of the long-term ones, but in the case of insulin this is at a price. Good control of blood glucose increases the likelihood of imbalance leading to a shortage of circulating glucose. This can have a sudden impact on the brain, which is a big glucose user and has few stores. Collapse may occur if the lack is severe, but less severe shortages can impair brain function – meaning that behaviour and comprehension are changed. This shortage can be remedied with glucose or by injecting another hormone glucagon, which antagonises the effects of insulin.

What effect does this complex condition have on fitness for seafaring? In general, those requiring insulin treatment are considered unfit for work at sea because of the sudden and potentially severe consequences of hypoglycaemia in a situation where emergency back-up is not available.

The impairment of understanding and

behaviour with less severe insulin overdose may affect the judgement of those doing safety-critical tasks. In addition, a careful balance must be maintained between food and insulin and this can be difficult in the event of seasickness, with varying work schedules and in emergencies. Those who are treated by diet, with or without tablets, are usually considered fit but required to have more frequent medicals, wherever possible with the same doctor, so that progress can be monitored. It is also important to assess feet, eyes and heart to ensure that there are no complications affecting these organs.

Stones

Stones formed in the gall bladder, kidney and urinary bladder can predispose to sudden episodes of pain (colic) when they get stuck in the narrow tubes leading from these organs. They can also be the focus for infections.

The mechanisms of stone formation in bile and urine differ. Thus only urinary stone formation can be reduced by drinking more and hence is a bigger problem in tropical climates where dehydration is more common. On-shore patients with these conditions are often observed for a period to see if the problem is a continuing one or whether surgery is needed. This approach may be appropriate for a few seafarers who only work close to their home ports, but not for those at a distance from medical care. There are circumstances where it is important to ensure that definitive treatment is given at an early stage if unlimited fitness is needed as in its absence a long period free from symptoms is essential before such a certificate can be issued.

Hernia and peptic ulcers

Rather similar criteria apply to those for stones. In both hernia and peptic ulceration, rare but foreseeable and potentially severe complications can arise. Delays in treatment on-shore where these emergencies can be handled is acceptable, but this is not an option for seafarers where severe restrictions are normally imposed until full cure is achieved.

Teeth

Good dental health can seem a trivial issue, but toothache and associated dental pain are common causes of medical emergencies at sea and can lead to costly diversions.

At one time they were the commonest reason for medivacs in Europe's North Sea offshore industry. Regular dental check-ups

Left: Regular dental check-ups ashore can help avoid painful problems with teeth and gums at sea.

Right: Testing for diabetes.





Repeat ailments

with treatment of any problems can greatly reduce the frequency of emergencies. This is something for which seafarers are personally responsible, but the revised medical standards are now requiring a declaration that seafarers have seen a dentist and had any necessary treatment within the last 12 months rather than the previous tooth and gum inspection by the approved doctor. This needs planning into leave periods and lack of a check-up could lead to major problems if it is only noticed at the time of joining a ship.

These are just some examples of the way in which fitness decisions are made in circumstances where there is a foreseeable risk of recurrence.

In considering medical conditions and fitness, several aspects have to be taken into account. Some relate to vessel and crew safety – poor vision or sudden incapacity on the bridge, fitness to tackle emergencies, risks of spreading infection. Some relate to the costs and risks of diversion or rescue – where onshore treatment must be secured in a hurry.

Finally, good preventive advice can reduce risks of future illness in seafarers – thus increasing the chance of a full career and reducing the probability of sudden illness while at sea.

A version of this article first appeared in The Telegraph, journal of the ITF-affiliated British seafaring union, Nautilus UK.

Keeping fit in Georgia

Organised by the Georgian Seafarers' Union, the Third International Seafarers' Sports Festival was held in Georgian ports on 24 October 2007. At the Batumi Maritime Academy, cadets of the academy, dockers from Batumi port and the Ukrainian crew of Malta-flag Zografia took part, with soccer and table tennis proving especially popular. The football match between the dockers' team and the Zografia crew ended in a 7-2 victory for the dockers.

The ITF contact in the port, Merab Chijavadze, reports that the crew were nevertheless rewarded with the football t-shirts, souvenirs and sport shoes donated by the union. And they were invited to a small party held in the local seafarers' club to taste delicious Georgian beer.



“Good preventive advice can reduce risks of future illness in seafarers – thus increasing the chance of a full career and reducing the probability of sudden illness while at sea.”

MARITIME ACCIDENTS

*Seafarers
- be aware!*

If your vessel is involved in a maritime accident, then be aware that there are international guidelines in place to ensure that you are treated fairly if an investigation is carried out and/or if you are detained by a State following the accident.

These guidelines are the **IMO/ILO Guidelines on the Fair Treatment of Seafarers in the event of a Maritime Accident**.

The Guidelines require that seafarers should be treated fairly by the port or coastal state, the flag state, the seafarer state and shipowners.

It is important that you understand your rights under these Guidelines so that if you are questioned or detained following a maritime accident, you know what to do and how to protect your interests.

If you are questioned about a maritime accident involving your vessel:

- If you think it is necessary, ask for a lawyer before answering any questions or making any statements to port, coastal or flag State investigators since these could be used against you in future criminal or other legal proceedings
- Contact your company and/or union for advice and assistance
- Make sure you fully understand everything that you are asked

- If there is anything you do not understand:
 - ask the authorities to stop the questioning
 - request the assistance of an interpreter, if necessary

It is important to ensure that you protect your interests first. Therefore, follow the advice you receive from your company, union or lawyer, and importantly, when advised to provide information, be truthful with investigators.

*Protect your interests following a maritime accident
Read the Fair Treatment Guidelines
Know your rights
If in doubt, ask for advice!*



**Keep up to date with campaigns such as the battle against flags of convenience and for improving on board conditions for seafarers.
Find out how to mobilise solidarity in support of workers facing challenges to their human and trade union rights.**

Information on the ITF Seafarers' Trust, women's issues and the ITF's legal and education services is also available online.

For advice, information and news on ITF activities in the shipping industry and on the global transport trade union movement log on to the ITF's website

www.itfglobal.org