



Letter to the Editor

27 July 2020

Dear Editor,

Shipping industry urges action to curb irresponsible behaviour

Recently, there have been media reports about the irresponsible behavior of individual practitioners. A few rotten apples have brought disrepute not only to their peers but also to the industry, which has been working extremely hard to ensure the smooth operation of the world's supply chain for essential items such as food, fuel and medical supplies, during this most difficult time for all. We are extremely disappointed with this. We have urged both international and local unions to remind their members to strictly follow all the rules, protocols and precautionary measures set by the port authorities and shipping companies to protect public health. We have also suggested the government to impose penalties on any parties who break the rules.

The United Nations International Maritime Organization and International Labour Organization require governments to take measures to facilitate crew change operations for both safety and employee protection. Presently, about 300,000 seafarers unfortunately remain trapped at sea and are unable to go home even after serving many months at sea, owing to lockdowns, travel restrictions and a severe reduction in the number of commercial flights in many parts of the world. Crew change operations are essential to relieve these stranded crews and to enable world trade to continue.

In May this year, the international and local unions have urged governments, including the HKSAR Government, to address the crew change issues by 15 June. As responsible employers, we deemed it necessary to pursue the matter with the government. We urged the government to fulfil its international obligation, while of course taking all necessary precautionary measures to reduce the risk of the spread of the coronavirus.

Since crew changes were facilitated on 9 June, as responsible community stakeholders, we advised our members to take appropriate measures, **in addition to** the government mandatory requirements, to safeguard the local community. These included requiring all seafarers to be tested COVID-19 negative before coming to Hong Kong. We also recommended other possible precautionary measures to the government. These included requiring all seafarers to be tested COVID-19 negative again on their arrival in Hong Kong, and imposing penalties on those companies and individuals breaking the rules.

On 20 July, in view of the fast-changing situation in Hong Kong, the two Associations already asked all their members to re-schedule or postpone crew changes, for at least three weeks.

We hope the above clarifies our position. Once again, we would like to stress that like other “key workers”, seafarers are essential for the global community, including Hong Kong people, to fight this battle against the virus. Without these heroes at sea, world trade would come to a screeching halt. If any of them are unfortunately infected, they deserve our support, not bias.

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