Revised guidance on combating piracy and armed robbery against ships was agreed by IMO’s Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) when it met at the Organization’s London Headquarters for its 86th session from 27th May to 5th June. Specific guidance relating to the continued attacks on ships off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden was also agreed. The busy agenda also covered the adoption of amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), including a new regulation to make the carriage of electronic charts mandatory, and the approval of goal-based standards for new oil tankers and bulk carriers, for future adoption.

Piracy and armed robbery against ships
The MSC reviewed the latest statistics on piracy and armed robbery against ships, in particular off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden, where ships continue to be attacked and hijacked, despite the concerted efforts of the international community, spearheaded by IMO, navies and the industry, to protect shipping. The number of acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships reported to the Organization to have occurred in 2008 was 306, against 282 during 2007, representing an increase of 8.5%. In the first four months of 2009, 157 incidents were reported to IMO.

The MSC agreed updated Recommendations to Governments for preventing and suppressing piracy and armed robbery against ships; and Guidance to shipowners and ship operators, shipmasters and crews on preventing and suppressing acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships. The guidance to shipmasters and crew includes a new annex aimed at seafarers, fishermen and other mariners who may be kidnapped or held hostage for ransom, based on the current United Nations guidance on surviving as a hostage. An MSC circular on Piracy and armed robbery against ships in waters off the coast of Somalia was agreed, to include Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the Coast of Somalia, which have been developed by industry organizations, and additional guidance to vessels engaged in fishing, identified as being particularly vulnerable to attack. The MSC agreed that flag States should strongly discourage the carrying and use of firearms by seafarers for personal protection or for the protection of a ship. Seafarers, it was agreed, are civilians and the use of firearms requires special
training and aptitudes and the risk of accidents with firearms carried on board ship is great. Carriage of arms on board ship may encourage attackers to carry firearms or even more dangerous weapons, thereby escalating an already dangerous situation. Any firearm on board may itself become an attractive target for an attacker. Carriage of firearms may pose an even greater danger if the ship is carrying flammable cargo or similar types of dangerous goods. It was agreed that the use of unarmed security personnel is a matter for individual shipowners, companies, and ship operators to decide. The carriage of armed security personnel, or the use of military or law-enforcement officers (duly authorized by the Government of the flag State to carry firearms for the security of the ship) should be subject to flag State legislation and policies and is a matter for the flag State to authorize, in consultation with ship owners, companies and ship operators. The MSC also agreed proposed amendments to the Code of practice for the investigation of the crimes of piracy and armed robbery against ships (resolution A.922(22)), for consideration by the IMO Assembly later this year.

**ECDIS and BNWAS to be made mandatory under SOLAS**

Amendments to SOLAS regulation V/19, to make mandatory the carriage of Electronic Chart Display and Information Systems (ECDIS) and Bridge Navigational Watch Alarm Systems (BNWAS), under SOLAS chapter V, Safety of Navigation, were adopted, with an expected entry into force date of 1st January 2011. The requirements will be mandatory for new ships and phased-in for existing ships.

**Other SOLAS amendments adopted**

Other SOLAS amendments adopted, with an expected entry force date of 1st January 2011, include:

(a) an amendment to SOLAS regulation II-1/3-5.2, to prohibit all new installations of asbestos on board ships, without exceptions;

(b) amendments to the title of Chapter VI to read, Carriage of Cargoes “and Oil Fuels” and to Regulation VI/5-1 on Material safety data sheets (MSDS) to require MSDS to be provided for ships carrying oil or oil fuel, prior to the loading of such oil as cargo in bulk or bunkering of oil fuel. The MSC also approved Recommendations for material safety data sheets (MSDS) for MARPOL Annex I type cargoes and oil fuels.

**Goal-based new ship construction standards**

The MSC approved international goal-based ship construction standards for bulk carriers and oil tankers, together with proposed amendments to SOLAS Chapter II-1 making their application mandatory, for consideration at MSC 87 with a view to
adoption. The proposed SOLAS regulation II-1/3-10 on Goal-based ship construction standards for bulk carriers and oil tankers would apply to oil tankers and bulk carriers of 150 metres in length and above. It would require new ships to be designed and constructed for a specified design life and to be safe and environmentally friendly, in intact and specified damage conditions, throughout their life. The ship should have adequate strength, integrity and stability to minimize the risk of loss of the ship or pollution to the marine environment due to structural failure, including collapse, resulting in flooding or loss of watertight integrity. The MSC also approved, in principle, Guidelines for verification of conformity with goal-based ship construction standards for bulk carriers and oil tankers, for adoption at MSC 87. Draft Guidelines for the information to be included in a Ship Construction File were considered and will be further developed at the next MSC session. The goal-based standards have been developed on the basis of a five-tier system, consisting of goals (Tier I), functional requirements (Tier II), verification of conformity (Tier III), rules and regulations for ship design and construction (Tier IV) and industry practices and standards (Tier V). The proposed goal-based standards reflect tiers I to III.

Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT)
The MSC was updated on the implementation status of the LRIT system and considered the outcome of the seventh session of the Ad Hoc LRIT Group, which met in March. The LRIT system, as from 1st January 2009, is in production and is being implemented by all SOLAS Parties. Some LRIT Data Centres are still undergoing testing and they are expected to complete the full integration into the LRIT system before 30th September 2009. In the meantime, contractual arrangements between LRIT Data Centres are under consideration for receiving and providing LRIT information.

The MSC agreed Guidance on the survey and certification of compliance of ships with the requirement to transmit LRIT information; Guidance to search and rescue services in relation to requesting and receiving LRIT information; and an MSC circular on information communicated to the Organization in relation to the establishment of LRIT Data Centres and their position in relation to developmental testing in the production of the LRIT system. The latter instructs the IMO Secretariat to make available a list showing the SOLAS Contracting Governments, which have established LRIT Data Centres that have been integrated into, and are operating in, the LRIT system and the status of LRIT arrangements within other Contracting Governments.

Comprehensive review of the STCW Convention and Code
The MSC approved, in principle, the preliminary draft revised text of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and
Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) 1978, as amended, and the STCW Code, prepared by the Sub-Committee on Standards of Training and Watchkeeping (STW). The Committee authorized the holding of an ad hoc intersessional meeting of an STW working group, from 7th to 11th September 2009, to progress the work, with a view to finalization at STW 41 in January 2010. STW 41 would then finalize the draft text of amendments to the STCW Convention and Code, with a view to their circulation for consideration by a Diplomatic Conference, scheduled for mid-2010.

Implementation of the revised STCW Convention
The list of Parties deemed to be giving full and complete effect to the provisions of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) 1978, as amended, was updated in the light of the report on those countries of which independent evaluations have been completed since the previous MSC meeting.

MODU Code 2009 approved for adoption by the Assembly
The draft Code for the Construction and Equipment of Mobile Offshore Drilling Units, 2009, which revises and updates the MODU Code adopted in 1989 (resolution A.649(16)), was approved, prior to submission to the IMO Assembly for adoption. The MODU Code provides an international standard for mobile offshore drilling units of new construction, to facilitate the international movement and operation of these units and ensure a level of safety equivalent to that required by the SOLAS Convention and the 1988 Protocol to the Load Lines Convention for conventional ships engaged on international voyages.

Code on Alerts and Indicators to be approved for adoption by the Assembly
The draft Code on Alerts and Indicators, 2009 was approved by the MSC. It is also being submitted to the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC), in July, for concurrent approval and submission to the IMO Assembly for adoption. The Code is intended to provide general design guidance and to promote uniformity of type, location and priority for alerts and indicators required by the SOLAS Convention, including relevant performance standards, and by the MARPOL Convention, as well as by other associated instruments and codes. The Code, when adopted, will update, revise and replace the Code on Alarms and Indicators, 1995 (resolution A.830(19)).

FSA Experts Group established to review studies
A Formal Safety Assessment (FSA) Experts Group was established to review FSA studies on cruise ships, ro-ro passenger ferries, liquefied natural gas carriers and containerships, which had been carried out within the SAFEDOR research project and previously submitted to the MSC. The MSC agreed to hold an intersessional
meeting of the FSA Experts Group to finalize the review and report to MSC 87, to include any recommendations from each FSA study that may require action by the Committee or Sub-Committees.

**Maritime security - voluntary self-assessment scheme reviewed**
The MSC reviewed Member States’ experience with implementing MSC.1/Circ.1192 Guidance on voluntary self-assessment by SOLAS Contracting Governments and by port facilities and MSC.1/Circ.1194, which includes Guidance on basic elements of national oversight programmes for SOLAS chapter XI-2 and the ISPS Code. Governments, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations were invited to submit the results of their experiences to the next session. The MSC agreed Revised guidance to masters, companies and duly authorized officers on the requirements relating to the submission of security-related information prior to the entry of a ship into port (updating MSC/Circ.1130).

**Other issues**
The MSC considered other issues arising from the reports of Sub-Committees and other bodies, adopted a number of resolutions and approved other circulars and draft amendments, including:


(ii) Guidelines for the drainage of fire-fighting water from closed vehicle and ro-ro spaces and special category spaces for passenger and cargo ships.

(iii) Interim Guidelines on safety for gas-fuelled engine installations in ships;


(v) Revised Guidelines for ships operating in polar waters, for concurrent approval by MEPC 59 and subsequent adoption by the Assembly.

(vi) Draft amendments to the Survey Guidelines under the Harmonized System of Survey and Certification, for concurrent approval by MEPC 59 and subsequent adoption by the Assembly.

(vii) Draft amendments to the Code for the Implementation of Mandatory IMO Instruments, 2007, for concurrent approval by MEPC 59 and subsequent adoption by the Assembly.