IMO Council 102nd session
29th June to 3rd July 2009

IMO Council makes 2010 the Year of the seafarer

The Council of the IMO, meeting for its 102nd session in London from 29th June to 3rd July, agreed that next year’s theme for World Maritime Day will be 2010: Year of the Seafarer, endorsing a proposal from IMO, Secretary-General Admiral Efthimios E. Mitropoulos.

The theme, to be celebrated throughout the year and also at a World Maritime Day parallel event in Argentina, was selected to give IMO and the international maritime community the opportunity to pay tribute to the world’s seafarers for their unique contribution to society and in recognition of the risks they shoulder in the execution of their duties in an often hostile environment. In proposing it, Secretary-General Mitropoulos said that “the unique hazards confronting the 1.5 million seafarers of the world - including pirate attacks, unwarranted detention and abandonment - coupled with the predicted looming shortage of ships' officers, make it ever more incumbent to take immediate and effective action to forestall a situation from developing in which ships are not manned with sufficient skilled personnel.”

The theme complements IMO’s ongoing Go to Sea! campaign to attract new entrants to the shipping industry, which was launched in November 2008 in association with the International Labour Organization, the Round Table of shipping industry organizations and the International Transport Workers Federation. It is also in line with the comprehensive review, initiated in 2006, of the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) 1978 and its associated Code, updated texts of which are due to be considered by a Diplomatic Conference scheduled to be held in Manila, Philippines, in mid-2010. Once adopted, the proposed amendments to the STCW Convention and Code will provide the necessary global standards for the training and certification of seafarers to man technologically advanced ships, today and for some time to come.

2010-2011 budget proposals considered
The Council considered the Secretary-General’s proposals for the Organization’s budget during the 2010-2011 biennium, which is expected to be approved at the 25th extraordinary session of the Council (to be held from 19th and 20th November...
The Council agreed to award the International Maritime Prize for 2009 to Mr. Alberto Alemán Zubieta, current Administrator of the Panama Canal Authority. Mr. Alemán has degrees in Civil Engineering and Industrial Engineering from Texas A&M University and was CEO of one of Panama's largest construction companies before becoming, in 1996, Chief Executive Officer/Administrator of the Panama Canal Commission, the United States Government federal agency which administered the Canal until 31st December 1999. In 1998 he was appointed as the Panama Canal Authority’s Administrator, a role which he performed simultaneously with that of administrator of the Commission. He has led the Panama Canal Authority since it took over the running to the Canal in 2000.

IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea
The Council endorsed the decision of a Panel of Judges that the 2009 IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea should go to two nominees:

- Mr. Maurice Conti and Mrs. Sophie Conti, United States citizens, nominated by New Zealand, for the rescue, in rough seas, of three crew members from the yacht Timella, which had grounded and then sunk, off a remote South Pacific coral reef. The Contis are non-professional sailors who, at the time of the incident, were sailing with their young family. They planned and executed the rescue in the middle of the night (12th/13th October 2008), exposing themselves to considerable risk, in the absence of marine/aviation rescue assets.

- AST2 Abram A. Heller of the United States Coast Guard, nominated by the United States, for single handedly rescuing, in the early hours of 23rd March 2008, eight crew members of the foundered fishing vessel Alaska Ranger, in arctic weather conditions. AST2 Heller is a professional rescue swimmer who gave up his place in the rescue helicopter to enable five seafarers to be taken to safety. He waited for more than one hour for the return of the helicopter, on a life raft, in freezing conditions, with three further members of the fishing vessel’s crew whom he had pulled into the raft. In so doing, he acted over and above the standard expected of a professional rescuer, particularly as it was his first deployment.

The Council also decided that four other nominees will receive Certificates of Commendation and eleven will receive Letters of Commendation. A total of 32 nominations from twelve IMO Member States and four non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in consultative status were received and considered by an Assessment Panel consisting of experts nominated by various NGOs. A Panel of Judges then met, under the chairmanship of the Council Chairman, with the
participation of the Chairmen of IMO’s Maritime Safety; Marine Environment Protection; Legal; Technical Co-operation; and Facilitation Committees.

A ceremony for the winners to receive their awards will be held later in the year.

**Exceptional services rendered to shipping and mankind**

The Council also endorsed the proposal of the Secretary-General to recognize, through the award of certificates, the exceptional services rendered to shipping and mankind by the Commanding Officers, Officers, Petty Officers and ships’ companies of the navy ships from many countries that have converged in the Western Indian Ocean area, since late 2008, in an unparalleled demonstration of international solidarity to prevent and repress piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden.

Admiral Mitropoulos told the Council that the actions of “these courageous men and women, and those of their governments in sending them to the area, have contributed to making international shipping transiting these troubled waters safer and more secure while, at the same time, greatly contributing to the safe delivery of vital humanitarian relief supplies to the people of Somalia. The actions of these individuals deserve to be publicly recognized and honoured by IMO, which has been entrusted by the international community with the responsibility of promoting the safety and security of international shipping. Our doing so will signify not only our profound appreciation for their actions but will also, hopefully, encourage even more Governments to participate in the international efforts, spearheaded by IMO, to reduce the scourge of piracy off the Horn of Africa.”

Time scale agreed to make mandatory the IMO Member State Audit Scheme

The Council approved, in principle, a five-year plan which would see the Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme phased in as an institutionalized, mandatory scheme.

The Council requested Secretary-General Mitropoulos to prepare a resolution delineating the way forward, together with a proposed timeframe and schedule for the further development of the Audit Scheme, for consideration and approval by the next session of the Council, for submission to the IMO Assembly for adoption, both scheduled to be held in November 2009. Such a timeframe would entail, in principle, the introduction of appropriate requirements in the relevant mandatory IMO instruments, with consequential amendments to these being adopted possibly in 2013, for subsequent entry into force in January 2015. A resolution on the Framework and Procedures for the new phase of the Scheme would also need to be adopted by the IMO Assembly, with preparatory work for commencement of an institutionalized Scheme following thereafter.
Under the current Scheme, the first audits were carried out in 2006 and, to date, 50 IMO Member States and one Associate Member have volunteered for audit and 31 audits have been completed.

Meanwhile, the Council encouraged Member States that have not yet volunteered for audits to do so as and when they are ready, and as early as possible, and invited Member States to nominate qualified auditors who can be selected for audit teams and who can participate in the related training courses convened by the Organization.