SOS SAVE OUR SEAFARERS LAUNCHED

Torture and executions prompt SOS calls from global shipping chiefs

Global shipping chiefs called upon the world to help secure the release of hundreds of innocent seafarers snatched by Somali pirates, it was reported from London on 1\textsuperscript{st} March.

The Round Table of International Shipping Associations comprises BIMCO, ICS/ISF, INTERCARGO and INTERTANKO and has embarked on a major campaign to encourage over a million people to heap pressure on their national governments to crackdown on piracy.

There is no longer a way for ships coming from the Middle East to avoid the Somali pirate gangs in the Indian Ocean, but with greater political will, governments could, it is believed, resolve this growing Somali piracy crisis in the Indian Ocean that affects so many. Over 800 seafarers are currently held hostage in appalling conditions by armed gangs of Somali pirates. Subjected to physical and psychological abuse for months at a time, they are held ransom for millions of dollars.

Launching their SOS Save Our Seafarers campaign with the website \url{www.saveourseafarers.com} the Round Table and the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) aim to highlight the plight of seafarers and bring pressure on governments to show more political will and fewer legalistic excuses in dealing with this situation.

As we well know merchant ships are being attacked daily and run a gauntlet of gunfire and rocket-propelled grenade attacks. In addition to the human cost, piracy is strangling key supply routes and is said to cost the global economy $12 billion a year. There is no doubt that piracy is out of control. As pirates use hijacked merchant ships (the so-called mother ships) to extend their reach almost to Indian waters, some 1500 miles from Somalia half the world’s oil supply is at risk. For tankers coming from the Gulf and the Middle East there is no longer an optional route to avoid the pirates – and a hijacked tanker with two million barrels of oil represents 20\% of daily oil imports to the USA, it is claimed.

The world’s economy relies upon shipping for the safe delivery of 90\% of its food, fuel, raw materials, humanitarian aid and manufactured
goods and therefore regional stability and the freedom to serve world trade is threatened.

Round Table’s SOS campaign is specifically asking for governments to recognise the threat to the world’s seafarers and the world economy, and to take the necessary steps to eradicate piracy at sea and ashore by reducing the effectiveness of the easily-identifiable pirate mother ships and authorising naval forces to detain pirates and deliver them for prosecution and punishment.

Furthermore, the organisation calls for fully criminalising all acts of piracy, and intent to commit piracy, under national laws in accordance with their mandatory duty to co-operate to suppress piracy under international conventions.

In conclusion, SOS calls for an increase in naval assets available in this area, the provision of greater protection and support for seafarers and the tracing and criminalisation of the organisers and financiers behind the pirates’ networks.

Readers are invited to visit: http://www.saveourseafarers.com where they will be able to sign and despatch a prepared letter to their head of government. Also to be found there are up-to-the minute information on the piracy situation, and an SOS TV page with film clips and pictures.