



PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

UNITED NATIONS | NEW YORK

12 October 2020

Excellencies,

I have the honour to acknowledge the letter dated 6 October 2020 from the Secretary-General of the United Nations addressed to me in my capacity as President of the 11th Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The letter was prepared by the Secretary-General in his personal capacity and responsibility to report to all States Parties pursuant to article 319 of the Convention.

Please accept, Excellencies, the assurances of my highest consideration.

H.E. Pawan Gatoor
President of the 11th Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

Representative of States Parties
to the United Nations Convention
on the Law of the Sea



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

6 October 2020

Dear Mr. President,

In keeping with my responsibility to report to all States Parties, pursuant to Article 319 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on issues of a general nature, relevant to States Parties, that have arisen with regard to the Convention, I take this opportunity to express my deep concern regarding the health and safety of thousands of seafarers around the world affected by travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has left an estimated 300,000 seafarers stranded at sea for unprecedented periods of 17 months, contrary to international conventions on maritime labour, shipping and the law of the sea.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has had the devastating impact on economic and social consequences globally, the current plight of seafarers around the world needs urgent attention. The situation is increasingly precarious as seafarers cannot operate indefinitely, and disruptions to international shipping would have devastating consequences.

Since the outset of the pandemic, I have made several public appeals, including on the Day of the Seafarer, for governments to designate seafarers and other maritime personnel as “key workers” and to facilitate safe crew changeovers, cross-border travel and access by seafarers to medical treatment. I reiterated this call and my growing concerns on 24 September 2020, on the occasion of World Maritime Day.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the two million seafarers employed in the shipping sector are substantial. I recently reported to States Parties on the situation in my report on *World Maritime Day 2020* and in my report on Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (see A/75/340, paragraphs 7-9, 51-54). Among the challenges outlined in the report are the lack of sufficient personal protective equipment and medical care on board vessels, lack of access to shore-based medical care and welfare services, and increased stress, isolation and social pressures.

His Excellency
Mr. Burhan Gafoor
President of the Thirtieth Meeting of States Parties
to the United Nations Convention on the
Law of the Sea
New York

The inability of vessels, operators to manage crew, and other factors during the period of lockdown, was reported as being particularly problematic. Seafarers have also faced unilateral or unlawful extensions of contracts on only minimal confinement on board ships, altered to anchorages or remote berths and unilateral termination of contracts, with some unable to leave their ships, be repatriated or seek urgent medical assistance. Incidences of violence, harassment, and sexual assault to occur. In addition to the humanitarian aspects, this is likely to have potentially result in endangering the safety and security of navigation.

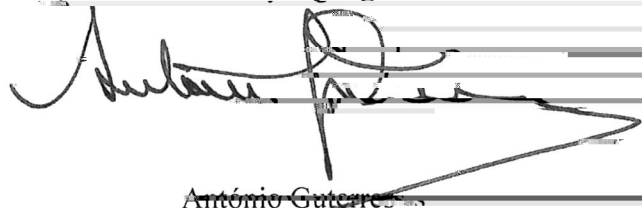
The International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), as well as other specialized agencies, members of the United Nations continue to coordinate urgent action to address the situation, including to provide legal, financial and technical assistance to the individual vulnerability of seafarers and to provide a fair and equitable guidance on health, safety and crew changes.

In a Circular dated 4 September 2020, the Secretary-General of the IMO requested the Member States of the IMO to consider raising the issue of seafarers with the relevant bodies during the high-level week of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. During a high-level side event organized in the margins of the General Assembly on 24 September 2020, international organizations, seafarer organizations, shipping industry leaders and business associations discussed the situation and called for coordinated actions by all stakeholders.

The international community has a responsibility to undertake concerted efforts to address this impending humanitarian crisis. As shipping accounts for approximately 80 per cent of global trade, the industry has had significant impacts on the global economy and international supply chains that are critical for the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery.

I should be most grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. I would urge them to take every action possible, including by fully implementing their obligations under the Convention to take all measures for ships flying their flags as are necessary to ensure safety of navigation with regard to the crewing of ships, labour conditions and the training of crews, taking into account the applicable international instruments.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my highest consideration.



António Guterres