

Athens, January 11, 2001

To the Chairman, Hon. Peter Morris and the Distinguished Members of ICONS

**A CONTRIBUTION to the WORK of the
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION on SHIPPING**

It has been established that the oceans of the planet are the cradle of life whilst maritime transport is an essential part of peaceful international commerce which is the life blood of the world. This becomes ever more important now that globalization is gaining momentum.

However, this cradle of our life is seriously endangered by our actions on land and at sea, which, without our proper knowledge and awareness, threaten the marine environment with pollution.

It is historically established that man's psyche's inherent disadvantages of greed and hunger for power coupled with indifference, lead to destruction's that halt the evolution of mankind at various periods. At the same time, these drawbacks help the cultivation of bad practices and habits, which persistently remain in the course of time.

Shipping, this very old profession, could not be any different than any other man's engagement either for earning his life or for survival. For centuries man's presence in the oceans was characterized by bravery and heroism, which together with ingenuity comprised seamanship.

The discovery of oil resulted in the first industrial revolution, which in turn brought about amenities that made life easier and more comfortable but at the detriment of the environment. New man-made products based on oil as raw material generated debris non-biodegradable and therefore unfriendly to the world existing in the sea water, that is the marine ecosystem.

The international community recognized the need for the adoption of regimes that would regulate activities potentially leading to pollution. However, the unfortunate fact is that such broad recognition takes place after incidents or accidents with loss of life, property and environmental destruction. Even though marine pollution from shipping from all sources worldwide has always been much less than that of land-based man's activities, the international community seems to be most effective in regulating the world shipping industry. It was recently officially announced at IMO that shipping is responsible for the 12% of the global pollution from all sources whereas the remainder is attributed to our life on land.

Ships are potential polluters if not properly built, professionally manned and managed, thoroughly maintained and carefully examined. In spite of the fact that all these requirements are legislated by the various international conventions in force and a plethora of mechanisms are at the disposal of flag states, numerous ships and their managers seem to be capable to avoid compliance. These are the so-called "substandard" vessels and companies that the world at IMO is feverishly trying to eliminate.

In an informal way of expression, one might say that the goal of the International Commission in Shipping is to come up with proposals on how to tackle with substandard shipping, after investigating and analyzing reasons for its existence and shedding light into gray areas. And such investigation and exercise could not be addressed but to the human factor itself in all sectors of activities in shipping, administrations included.

No one can deny that protecting the seas from pollution and exploiting the ocean resources are compatible as long as man exercises care, restraint and understanding. These are the ultimate targets of the widely accepted conventions as well as of national laws and regulations which are all designed to eliminate ship-generated pollution and enhance safety at sea.

As every day experience shows, this framework of legislation is not fully effective because of lack of commitment on the part of a number of people engaged in all sectors of the shipping industry. That is a commitment to the creation and continuous enhancement of safety mindedness and pollution prevention preparedness. Such commitment can only be achieved if a high level of professional environmental consciousness is created and maintained throughout the industry as safety and pollution prevention go hand in hand for the avoidance of accidents. This consciousness will help change the prevailing mentality as it will complement the regulatory level as presently described by the requirements of the revised STCW and Code as well as the ISM Code. A concerted voluntary effort to educate and inform all sectors of the industry "from shipowner to seafarer" guarantees the successful achievement of such consciousness.

The above ideas have been tried in HELMEPA (the Hellenic Marine Environment Protection Association) in Greece where it was voluntarily created by the Greek shipowners and seafarers on June 4, 1982 and still successfully, to the surprise of many in world shipping, delivering its mandate.

Substandard vessels do not only pose threats to the environment but also to the people onboard. Furthermore, their owners and operators are constantly running the risk of financial destruction not to mention other repercussions.

HELMEPA believes if a voluntary specially designed Refresher Updating Training was encouraged, the pride to the professions in all sectors of shipping would be boosted resulting into having all other players for the safe and environmentally friendly operation of shipping follow suit. The suggested training, as is the case of HELMEPA, would be addressed to operators, managers and agents, masters, deck and engineer officers and seafarers as well as people from the Port State Control, i.e. Coast Guard officers. This way, a uniform spirit would gradually spread throughout the industry as shipyards, shippers, charterers, insurers and bankers associated with a number of the previously mentioned, would be inevitably influenced thus shipping regaining the social respect it surely deserves.

Trusting that these thoughts made on behalf of 12,000 Greek seafarers, over 500 vessels and 174 Greek and foreign companies, all members of HELMEPA, will be taken into consideration, I wish ICONS success for the benefit of all.

Sincerely,

Captain Dim. C. Mitsatsos, HN
HELMEPA, Director General