

ICONS Meetings in New York 8-11 September 2000

On 8 September, the Commission moved to New York where it met with the Center for Seafarers Rights and was briefed on the range of abuses of seafarers that continue to occur worldwide. The Commission was informed of the Seamens Church Institute facilities to train seafarers and the CSR's services to assist abandoned or abused seafarers.

The Commission continued public hearings, hosted by the New York Port Authority, on 11 September. The hearings were attended by the US Coast Guard, US Department of Transport, pilots associations, class societies, seafarer welfare organisations, port officials, shipping lines and maritime consultants.

Matters discussed included liability of class, pressures on ships' officers in port caused by multiple inspections, inconsistencies in port state control inspections, quality of ships crews and the adequacy of ISM documentation and audits, the need to address standards for ship recycling and the lack of Flag and Port State controls over fishing vessels. Proposals to address substandard shipping included greater liabilities and financial risks for owners, more transparency of information on substandard operators and charterers who use substandard ships, insurance for abandoned crews, harmonisation of standards and cooperation among neighboring states in recognising each others inspections, an international forum to adjudicate complaints and education in third world countries about substandard shipping operators, and a "no blame" no liability incident reporting system.

On 12 September the Commission met with the Secretariat to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development to discuss opportunities under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea that might be used to enhance Flag State accountability. Discussions also encompassed developments in the UN Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and Law of the Sea and a joint IMO, ILO and FAO working group to address illegal fishing and conditions aboard fishing vessels. Options for using UN committee meetings to promote and discuss ICONS findings in 2001 were also canvassed.

The Commission also held private meetings with the Vanuatu Registry, the Liberian Registry and ship owners and maritime consultants. These meetings discussed the relationships and responsibilities of owners, class societies, Flag States and Port States in meeting safety standards, the need for ship builders and naval architects to consider long term safety implications of new ship designs, and the need to improve the relevance and application of ILO convention requirements. The criteria that would define quality open registers and competitiveness of services offered to the industry that can enhance safety standards were discussed. Concerns included the lack of status attaching to careers in shipping, turnover and shortages of competent personnel. Rewards and incentives for good ship operators and exposure of substandard operations were also mentioned.