

MARITIME SAFETY COMMITTEE
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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Maritime Humanitarian Hub of the Americas, vaccinating seafarers regardless of nationality or flag flown by vessel

Submitted by Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and ITF

SUMMARY

Executive summary: The present document provides updated information on the arduous and committed work the Republic of Panama carries out daily for the vaccination campaign for all seafarers regardless of nationality or flag flown by vessel and who voluntarily wish to receive their vaccination(s) against COVID-19, under the programme "PANAMA, **Maritime Humanitarian Hub of the Americas**".

Strategic direction, if applicable: Not applicable

Output: Not applicable

Action to be taken: Paragraph 14

Related document: MSC 105/INF.13

Background

1 Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Republic of Panama, through the Panama Maritime Authority, has supported all actions, both national and international, aimed at counteracting the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as travel restrictions, obstacles to and delays in crew changes, repatriation, and lack of access to urgent medical assistance. This is in addition to the direct collateral effects it has had on our seafarers, such as mental and physical crisis (fatigue) due to prolonged confinement on board.

The following are some of the national and international actions supported by the Republic of Panama:

- .1 Designation of seafarers as key workers.
- .2 Panama is a signatory to the Neptune Declaration.

- .3 Adoption of resolution MSC.473(ES.2) on *Recommended action to facilitate ship crew change, access to medical care and seafarer travel during the COVID-19 pandemic*;
- .4 Adoption and application of MSC.1/Circ.1636/Rev.1 on *Industry recommended framework of protocols for ensuring safe ship crew changes and travel during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic*;
- .5 Adoption and implementation of resolution MSC.490(103) on *Recommended action to prioritize COVID-19 vaccination of seafarers*;
- .6 As the last measure to date, the International Maritime Organization issued resolution A.1160(32) on *Comprehensive action to address seafarers' challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic*, adopted at the thirty-second session of the Assembly.

2 We are infinitely grateful to the interested parties and all Member States of IMO for the joint work carried out, thanks to which countless guides, guidance documents and resolutions, among others, have been produced which serve directly to counteract the effects of COVID-19 in the maritime sector and thus safeguard the welfare of seafarers and give continuity to the supply chain.

Discussion

3 The Government of Panama, through the leadership of the Panama Maritime Authority (AMP) and with the support of the Ministry of Health of Panama (MINSa), has worked jointly to promote the vaccination of seafarers against COVID-19 and thus provide support to key workers. Since May 2021, several vaccination days have been held for workers in the maritime, logistics and port sector, as well as for Panamanian seafarers.

4 Following this action, Panama is expanding its national vaccination campaign against COVID-19 based on its unrestricted commitment to seafarers of any nationality who are on board vessels belonging to the Panama Ship Registry, as well as vessels registered under other flags, arriving in waters under our jurisdiction and who voluntarily wish to obtain their vaccination(s) against COVID-19 through the programme "**Vaccination for all Seafarers in Panama – Maritime Humanitarian Hub of the Americas**". A total of 300,000 doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine have been made available, as well as all the doses needed to give booster vaccines, using Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, which are administered free of charge. Through direct communication with shipping agencies, relevant information can be obtained from ships intending to dock to determine the number of seafarers interested in receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. The Republic of Panama remains fully available to continue and augment this vaccination work; therefore, we encourage all owners/operators, companies and maritime agencies to contact us if possible before their vessels dock, on either the Atlantic or the Pacific coast of Panama, so that the necessary internal logistics process can be completed and our key workers can be vaccinated successfully.

5 Supporting the world's key workers with a vaccination programme is a demonstration of the commitment we have driven as leaders of the merchant marine fleet since the beginning of the pandemic. We have recognized the urgency of protecting seafarers at all times, putting at their disposal our logistics hub, health protocols, shipping corridor, vaccines and our human talent, in decisive times for humanity and world maritime trade.

Panama, Maritime Humanitarian Hub of the Americas

6 The geographical location of the Republic of Panama, which connects the countries of the world, mainly those with commercial activity in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, is of vital strategic importance for international logistics and the growth of intercontinental trade. Thanks to this, Panama enjoys great advantages beyond its geographical location which position it as the **Maritime Hub of the Americas**. Without doubt, this acquired benefit has automatic appeal among the international maritime fleet.

7 Panama wishes to establish itself internationally as the **Maritime Humanitarian Hub of the Americas**, on account of its major efforts and solidarity in being the first country to offer humanitarian aid in difficult times on account of the COVID-19 pandemic, where uncertainty was a triggering factor and the risks were highly relevant. It should be noted that Panama, being a small country and considered to be a developing one, maintains a very strong humanitarian spirit, committed to continuing to support seafarers with crew changes, repatriation, medical assistance, humanitarian aid and vaccination, among others. It is important to mention here the assistance Panama gave to the crew and passengers of the **Zaandam** and the **Rotterdam**. This humanitarian act will go down in our history as a heroic and important act on account of the difficult situation in which we were living and the alarming forecasts of risk.

8 As mentioned above, we are confident that developing efficient mass vaccination programmes is key to ending this pandemic and protecting our seafarers, who are at the heart of shipping. Due to our geographical and strategic position, the Panama Canal and therefore the constant arrival, calls and transit of a large part of the world maritime fleet, without restrictions of nationality and ports of registry, the Republic of Panama wishes to express its intention to continue and augment its vaccination campaign for all seafarers, extending an invitation to all interested parties (international agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, Member States, among others) who wish to maintain the same commitment and concern to neutralize the consequences of COVID-19 and its variants, seeking to safeguard the welfare of seafarers and give continuity to the supply chain.

Proposal

9 Highlighting Panama's arduous and committed efforts with the vaccination campaign for seafarers, establishing itself as a pioneer in the region, developing a logistical project to vaccinate seafarers on a voluntary, free and unrestricted basis, we urge all Member States, international organizations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to join this effort.

10 To urge the International Maritime Organization to manage the establishment of other regional Maritime Humanitarian Hubs where the need is imperative due to the constant arrival of vessels and seafarers, in addition to seeking support mechanisms for the supply of vaccines that would be administered to seafarers in these regional humanitarian logistics centres.

11 The Committee may encourage all Member States that have a maritime single window system to include the request for vaccine doses within this system in order to expedite the international maritime vaccination process.

12 To urge IMO members and other key sectors of the global maritime industry, echoing the Neptune Declaration, to continue to promote policies and measures that facilitate priority access to vaccines for seafarers, as well as improve the coordination needed for more expeditious crew changes, complying with the health protocols of the region or country where they take place.

13 The Committee may take into consideration document MSC 105/INF.13 (informative document to be presented by Panama or audio/video, to attest to the work done by Panama, in support of this document), on the implementation and development of, and evidence presented by Panama during, the process of vaccinating seafarers, regardless of their nationality and of their vessel's port of registry.

Actions requested of the Committee

14 The Committee is invited to consider the proposals in paragraphs 9 to 13 and take any action it deems appropriate.
