



# Seafarers' Bulletin

English | no.33/2019

International Transport Workers' Federation



# Strength in unity

In this issue:

**Trade unions are good for you**

**Don't miss out on abandonment rights**

**Your pullout guide to getting help**



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The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) is an international trade union federation of transport trade unions, representing around 20.2 million transport workers in 658 unions in some 146 countries, including more than 850,000 seafarers. It is organised in eight industrial sections: seafarers, fishers, inland navigation, dockers, railways, road transport, civil aviation and tourism services. It represents transport workers at world level and promotes their interests through global campaigning and solidarity. The ITF has 140 inspectors and contacts working in ports worldwide.

## **ITF SEAFARERS' BULLETIN no.33/2019**

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**Cover photo:** Danny Cornelissen, Portpictures

# Welcome



**Abandonment is a scourge on our industry and affects countless seafarers every year. The good news is that seafarers now have new financial security rights under the Maritime Labour Convention – but you must act within a short period of time to make sure you don't lose out. I urge you to read our advice on page 21.**

This edition highlights the criminalisation of Croatian and Ukrainian seafarers and the steps ITF-affiliated unions are taking to assist them. I welcome the historic pledge by Asian nations in November 2018 to lead the fight for the fair treatment of seafarers, and hope that other regions will follow their example.

'Life at sea' and 'Trade unions' showcase as usual how ITF inspectors and local unions are there on the ground to help you whenever you're in trouble – whether you are owed wages, arrested on trumped up charges, or being bullied on board.

We're there for the long haul too – our support doesn't have to stop when we've helped you win compensation but will continue until your case is resolved, if at all possible. Or, as in the case of the tragic death of Cadet Kshitij (page 7), to work for industry-wide changes so that cadets are not exploited but are recognised as the future of maritime.

And sometimes we're there for routine inspections, to extend the hand of friendship and give reassurance that everything's as it should be on your ship.

Inspectors and unions often have to work collaboratively in port with port state control, national administrations and welfare organisations in your interest, and we highlight examples of this in action.

I'm delighted to introduce you to our newest and some more long-standing inspectors, and Steve Trowsdale, who co-ordinates the team. They're a formidable but friendly force.

We take a look behind the scenes on a cruise ship to see what it's like to spend your working life making other people's dream holidays come true. Page 8 of the pullout guide – which gives contact information for ITF inspectors – gives advice on how to avoid falling victim to scam recruiters, who particularly target seafarers seeking cruise jobs.

I'm pleased to introduce Katie Higginbottom, the new head of the ITF Seafarers' Trust (our charitable arm). She shares her ambition to align the Trust's work more closely with ITF unions and others to provide improved welfare services for seafarers.

I hope you are persuaded that being in an ITF union is good for you. Join our powerful global family.

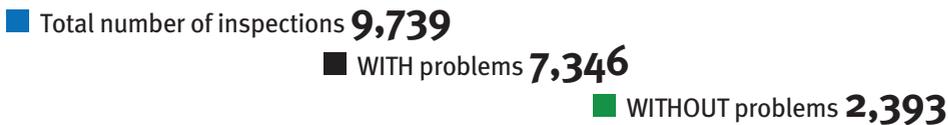
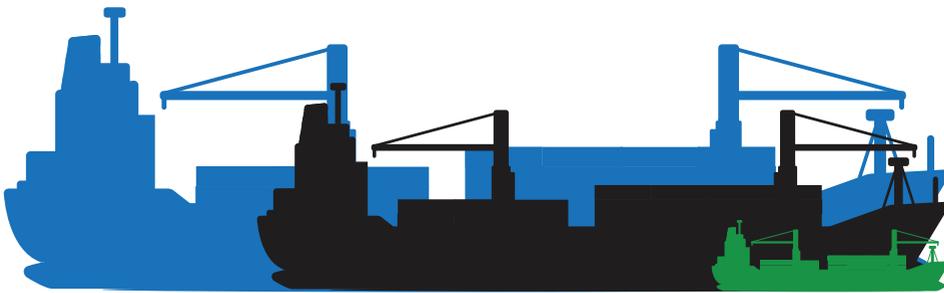
**Stephen Cotton**  
ITF general secretary

# The ITF FOC campaign in numbers (2018)

## ITF inspections

(at time of going to press)

Total number of vessels inspected broken down into number without problems and number with problems.



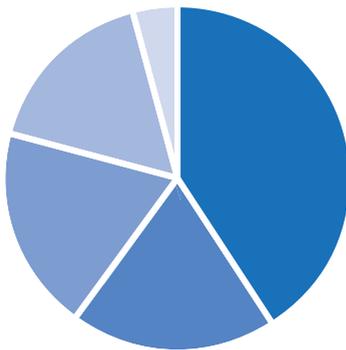
## Total backpay recovered

(at time of going to press)



## Top five problems by type found during ITF inspections

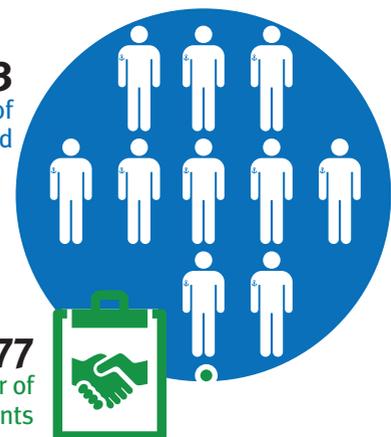
(at time of going to press)



## Vessels and seafarers covered by ITF agreements

(at time of going to press)

**300,063**  
Total number of  
Seafarers covered



**12,577**  
Total number of  
agreements



# Stories from the frontline



## Help to leave the Ali B

**ITF Italy inspector Paolo Siligato hails the successful outcome for two seafarers following co-operation between ITF unions in four countries**

In early September, we received a WhatsApp message from an Egyptian engineer who said he was on board a rusty Belize-flagged coaster named Ali B, in the port of Trieste, Italy.

The ship was not covered by an ITF agreement and the salaries were at International Labour Organization (ILO) minimum levels. He was forced to work 14 hours a day as an oiler, despite having his STCW as an officer. The contract sign-off date changed weekly, food was scarce and the ship's condition was poor, with low safety standards.

The vessel had been detained by the port state control (PSC) for many Maritime Labour Convention-related and other deficiencies. We were unable to get the seafarer repatriated in Trieste because the local ship agent had not begun the necessary paperwork. I obtained from the ship's master a written declaration that the seafarer would be signed off in the next port – Zarzis in Tunisia – but received no response from the manager. By now, the 3rd engineer also wanted to leave the ship.

When the ship set sail, we contacted the ITF Arab World network co-ordinator. He emailed the ship manager and asked the ITF's Tunisian contacts to support the seafarers and contact the PSC. But instead of calling at Tunisia, the ship disappeared for a few days before heading towards Libya, where it is dangerous to sign off. We were very worried by the silence of the seafarers and the manager.

Days later we tracked the vessel by its automatic identification system as it approached a shipyard in Constanta, Romania. We alerted the local ITF inspector there and warned the managers that we would inform the police about the seafarers being kept on board against their will. Suddenly we received copies of airline tickets and declarations signed by the two seafarers that their salaries had been settled in full.

Within hours, we received a photo of the smiling men at Bucharest airport, waiting to fly home. They wrote 'God bless you, ITF'. ■

## ITF hopeful for Blumenthal change

Since 2013, ITF inspector Ulf Christiansen has dealt with several legal cases where German company Blumenthal was accused of cheating crew members out of their pay. He describes how press coverage of the earlier cases helped a master avoid the same fate

There was a common pattern. Seafarers employed on Blumenthal vessels whose contracts were ending would sign their final wages account before disembarking and discover later, once they were home, that they had only been paid part of what they were owed.

The ITF had supported three seafarers – the master and chief mate of the Martha and the chief engineer of the Carola – with their claims but they suffered defeat in the Hamburg labour court in 2015 and 2016, when Blumenthal denied it was the men's employer.

The men were back at sea on different vessels but we encouraged them to send a Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) complaint to the flag state – Liberia. Eventually they did so, sending

the paperwork to the Liberian registry (LICSR) head office, in the United States.

In August 2017, the LICSR found in favour of the Martha's chief mate, and he received nearly USD2,000 from the company, two-thirds of his original claim. Unfortunately, in February 2018, the LICSR said it was unable to do anything to help the other two crew members, and their case was closed.

During all these cases, we kept the stories in the media to keep pressure on Blumenthal. This directly helped another seafarer avoid the same fate of losing some of his owed wages.

After reading a story in German weekly newspaper Die Zeit, the son of the Ukrainian master serving on the Blumenthal's Anna-

Meta contacted me in February 2018. He said the vessel was approaching the port of Singapore when the master received a sudden termination of his contract. The son asked for our advice about what his father should do.

We stressed that the master should not leave the vessel without having received his outstanding wages in full. Thankfully, he followed our advice and received the full amount (nearly USD13,200) before leaving the ship.

We've not been approached about any new cases since then, so perhaps Blumenthal has been shamed by the press coverage and concern in the industry into changing its ways. We hope so. ■

## Justice for blacklisted seafarer

ITF inspector Vadim Mamontov, Kaliningrad port, Russia, was shocked to uncover the blacklisting of a seafarer



In April 2018 a seafarer appealed to us for help in fixing an unbelievable problem.

Eight years earlier, he had been fired from a vessel for breaking its alcohol policy. The ship was flying under the Marshall Islands flag, and the seafarer claimed that the flag registry administration had included his data in its list of criminals, so denying him the right to be employed on Marshall Island vessels.

This was an unprecedented case, and we found it difficult to believe. But we wrote to the registry and were shocked to receive confirmation that the seafarer's account was true.

A vice president, seafarer documentation at International Registries Inc replied: 'Mr xxx's RMI documentation was revoked and he is permanently suspended from ever receiving any RMI documentation again. No manager of RMI ships can hire him to serve on an RMI registered vessel.'

In this way, we discovered clear signs of blacklisting of seafarers, which is prohibited by the rules of Standard A1.4 of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) between crewing agencies.

We asked for the legal grounds for the sanction and were referred to MI-108 Republic of the Marshall Islands Maritime Regulations and MI-107 Republic of the Marshall Islands Maritime Act 1990 (MA1990). We scrutinised these documents and found that the response to such a policy violation under section 847 of the MA1990 does not prohibit a seafarer from future employment under the flag. Instead, it states that the seafarer shall be subject to imprisonment and a fine of not more than USD2,500.

Prison is clearly too harsh a punishment in this case, and I'm pleased to say that the Investigative Review has now determined that there is sufficient evidence to reinstate the seafarer to an active status. This (means he has won back his right to employment on Marshall Island vessels and the registry is implementing the MLC standard. ■

# Tragic death triggers drive for cadet agreement

Christian Roos, ITF inspector, Belgium describes how the accidental death of a young cadet because safety requirements were not followed has helped generate a new momentum for change to stop the trainees being exploited as cheap labour



Cadet Kshitij Singh Bisht was 19, the son of proud parents and one of twins. He was a national table tennis player and had been accepted as a student in the navy, air force and merchant navy. He chose the merchant navy and excelled in his studies and it seemed certain that he would fulfil his dream of achieving the captain's certificate of competency.

In March 2017, Cadet Kshitij boarded a container vessel for the first time as deck cadet. On the second day of the voyage, he joined the watch with the on-duty deck officer. The bilges alarm sounded and both men went to the cargo hold to check for problems.

When heavy rain again activated the alarm, just before midnight, Cadet Kshitij was tasked to check the same hold. This time he went alone. Just 10 minutes later his lifeless body was found at the bottom of the stairs in the hold.

Accidents on board happen, even to experienced seafarers. But Cadet Kshitij should not have been unaccompanied: the International Convention on Standards of Training and Certification and Watchkeeping requires that he should have been supervised by an appropriately qualified officer.

Cadets are on board for training and to obtain

the required seagoing service, not to work or be exploited as cheap labour to keep costs down. Most of their training hours should be spent becoming thoroughly familiar with work and life on board as an officer or rating. They receive a monthly stipend, not a salary.

Pressure by the ITF helped Cadet Kshitij's family receive compensation in line with the ship's collective agreement. But the story did not stop there. I was asked to report on the case during the ITF's maritime week in May 2017 and was then tasked to develop a cadet agreement. Currently, cadets must be covered under a seafarers' employment agreement (SEA), or a training agreement in lieu of a SEA. Standard SEAs including overtime but most training agreements do not.

This work is underway, and momentum is growing across the industry. In October 2018, a report on Marshalls Island port state control inspections revealed deficiencies over cadet working hours, mostly in Belgium, with cadets in some cases often working excessive overtime hours. In November I discussed the issue with port state control inspectors based in Europe, Russia and Canada.

Cadet Kshitij should not have died. But we hope his death leads to change that means what happened to him never happens again. ■



## Natig Aliyev crew finally get paid

After eight months in anchorage, the 19-strong crew of the Natig Aliyev were finally paid. ITF Denmark inspector Morten Bach tells their story

In March 2018, the Russian crew of the Turkish/Russian-owned Natig Aliyev sent an anonymous cry for help to the ITF. They said they had been left without provisions, and their pay was in arrears.

The ship had been anchored off Skagen, Denmark for three weeks since early February, having been arrested by the Danish authorities over an oil dispute with a bunker company. At the end of February, the Danish Maritime Authority also detained the ship after a report from the ITF on the vessel's Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) violations.

After months of wrangling, at the end of September 2018 the ITF secured the payment of the USD324,370 in wages owed to the crew. This was paid not by the owner Palmali

Shipping but by the Estonian company that, with the help of a Danish agent in Aalborg, had taken over the charter and crew management of the vessel. On 24 September, the Danish authorities released the ship.

This was the second time in six months that the ITF had stepped in to assist the Natig Aliyev crew – in March 2018, we won crew wages dating back to November 2017, a total of USD250,000. And it was the third time within a year that Palmali Shipping was caught red-handed in Denmark violating the MLC.

I can only warn unscrupulous shipping companies against entering Danish waters. In ITF we pay attention and we have a very good co-operation with the Danish maritime and other authorities. ■

### Problems with pay?

Are you having problems with getting your pay in full? If you are, this could be a sign that your company is in economic trouble. Contact your union, an ITF inspector or the ITF at [seafsupport@itf.org.uk](mailto:seafsupport@itf.org.uk) as soon as possible to protect your wages and employment.

Think you've been abandoned? Read the advice on page 21.



Family members and ITF inspector Romano Perić visit Nikola Tolja and Ernest Pekar in Cadiz prison

## Seafarers detained for years finally freed

Romano Perić, ITF co-ordinator for Croatia, describes how the ITF and the Seafarers' Union of Croatia assisted with two disturbing cases of seafarers being criminalised on no evidence

Croatian Ivan Furčić and other crew members of the Sovereign M oil tanker were arrested for fuel smuggling in September 2015 and detained in Libya, despite there being no evidence. Worst of all, they had no chance of a fair defence in court.

Because of the political situation in Libya, Ivan Furčić was held in prison for two-and-a-half years pending trial. This was agony for both the seafarer and his family. The Seafarers' Union of Croatia (SUC) was involved in supporting them from the start.

Eventually he faced trial and was convicted and sentenced for three years. However, he was released and returned home safely in May 2018 because he had already spent that long in prison.

We are relieved that Ivan's ordeal is over, particularly given the circumstances in Libya. His case should be a warning to all seafarers always to check the company and the trading

area carefully before joining, in order to avoid any potentially dangerous situations.

Meanwhile, two other Croatian seafarers had been arrested in July 2017, along with other members of the crew of the tugboat *Eisvogel*. A vessel they were manoeuvring had no crew but a large amount of cigarettes was found on board and the men were arrested for smuggling contraband.

Nikola Tolja and Ernest Pekar were detained in Spain pending trial. The SUC did great work for the men and their families, enabling prison visits and keeping the case prominent in the media and with the maritime authorities.

After 16 months in prison, they faced trial in October 2018 and argued that there was no evidence against them and that they had no knowledge of what was on board the vessel. As the *Seafarers' bulletin* went to press, the SUC was hoping the two seafarers would be acquitted soon. ■

### Advice for seafarers facing criminal charges

If you face criminal charges, you must be treated fairly, regardless of the circumstances or your guilt or innocence. The following sources of information will help you find out about your rights, where to seek help and how to conduct yourself during an investigation.

ITF criminalisation toolkit <https://goo.gl/mGTE3N>  
Seafarers' Rights International [www.seafarersrights.org/seafarers-subjects/fair-treatment](http://www.seafarersrights.org/seafarers-subjects/fair-treatment)

# Trade unions are good for you

## *Seafarers' bulletin* explains why it's so important for men and women seafarers to join a trade union

You are stronger in a trade union because there is strength in numbers. Fighting a battle for your rights is hard when you're on your own, far away at sea. Your chances of winning justice or protecting yourself is hugely increased when a union is working on your behalf.

They work alongside ITF inspectors to help secure owed wages, assist you to get home safely when you've been abandoned and provide legal advice if you face criminal charges. In countries where there is no ITF inspector, a trade union can be your emergency point of contact.

Some maritime unions provide additional services and benefits to seafarers and their dependants, including welfare assistance, training and education, medical care and social activities. The ITF and its unions also provide guidelines for seafarers on subjects such as bullying, sexual harassment and HIV/AIDS.

Unions affiliated to the ITF must adhere to clear principles laid down in the ITF's constitution about how they operate. Together, they make up a powerful global family which strives to shape international and national maritime policy

in the interests of seafarers. For example, it was the ITF and its maritime unions who successfully fought for the first seafarers' bill of rights, the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006.

If you are working on a ship that is covered by an ITF Collective Agreement, you will automatically become a member of the ITF union that holds the agreement, for the duration of the agreement. ■



## Challenges for women seafarers

Women seafarers make up around two percent of the world's maritime workforce. They work mainly in the cruise and ferry sector and often for flag of convenience (FOC) vessels, which are among the worst paid and least protected jobs at sea.

Women wanting to become seafarers can face discrimination at every stage of their journey.

In some countries, maritime education and training institutions are not allowed

to recruit women to nautical courses; in others, seafaring careers simply aren't promoted to women. Women tend to enrol on navigation rather than engineering courses. When women do qualify, some shipowners don't want to employ them. Then once they've got a job, women seafarers may be paid less than male colleagues doing equivalent work and may be denied the facilities or equipment available to male workers.

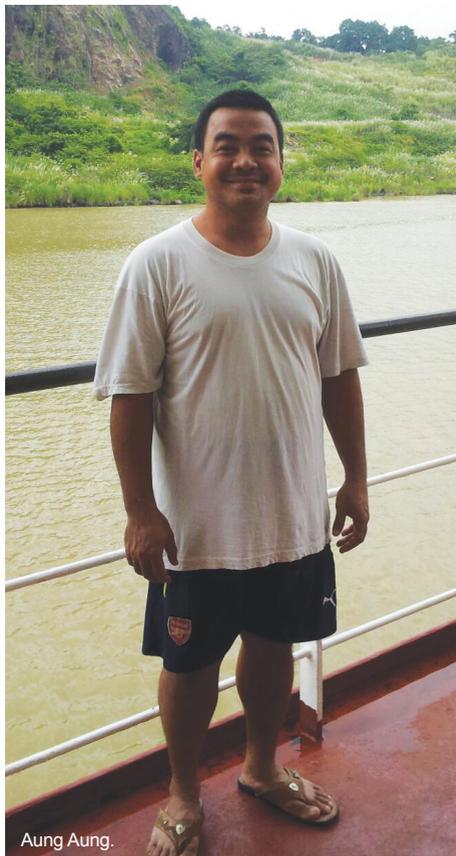
The ITF and its maritime unions work

to reduce gender stereotypes and discrimination and to develop sexual harassment policies and training. For example, they fight for a better approach to maternity benefits and rights within the industry, access to confidential medical advice and the contraceptive and morning-after pill, and the provision of sanitary items on board ship.

More information for women seafarers is available at: <http://bit.ly/2r0ChDJ>.

# Winning justice for families of dead seafarers

Local shipping companies in Myanmar sometimes try to avoid claims for compensation by declaring that deceased seafarers committed suicide. Lu Aung from IFOMS shares the union's success in winning justice for two families



Aung Aung.

Aung Aung was an experienced oiler who began working on ANNE 1 in July 2017. Just months later, on 29 October, while the ship was near Gibraltar, he was declared man overboard. His body was found the next day, some 350 miles away.

The company informed Aung Aung's wife that he had committed suicide, an account which the master's report and crew statements backed.

However, Aung Aung's family did not believe this claim and came into the IFOMS office to ask for our help with the case. We discovered that each statement from the master and crew was exactly the same, indicating that the company had ordered them to give those accounts.

We contacted the ITF for more assistance and they helped in the negotiations that followed.

On 25 January 2018, the company contacted IFOMS and agreed to give compensation to the family. A month later, on 27 February, they received USD40,000. Through a government scheme, they were also awarded local life insurance compensation of 5 million Kyats (approximately USD3,100).

The family of another seafarer who had died,

Myint Thein Tun, struggled unsuccessfully for weeks to win justice before they turned to IFOMS for help.

Myint Thein Tun was chief engineer on the Panama-flagged The Wise when his family received a call from the company on 13 September 2017 saying he had died at the Longshan shipyard in China. The company was vague about the circumstances of his death but told the relatives that it would only arrange to hand over the dead body when the family had signed a document declaring the cause of death as suicide.

The company alleged that a prescription antidepressant was found in his blood, that a workmate claimed that the seafarer was suicidal and that Myint Thein Tun had left a note. The signature on that note was totally different to the seafarer's, and his wife refuted all claims about his mental health.

After getting nowhere in her requests for assistance to government offices and the embassy, the widow finally came into our office on 20 November. After just four days of our involvement, the company put us in touch with the P&I club and on 13 December, Myint Thein Tun's wife received USD140,298.17 in compensation. ■

## Dispute over Panama locks safety escalates

The conflict between the Unión de Capitanes y Oficiales de Cubierta and the Panama Canal Authority over health and safety for tugboat captains in the Panamax locks operations escalated in 2018. ITF seafarers section assistant secretary Fabrizio Barcellona explains why

When the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) inaugurated its new locks in June 2016, it failed to take into account the findings of ITF-commissioned research into their safety, or to discuss the issues with unions. Since then, several accidents and incidents have shown ACP to be even more hostile in their actions against the Unión de Capitanes y Oficiales de Cubierta (UCOC). Trade unions in Panama are concerned that the ACP is solely focused on increasing the profitability of the locks system.

The lack of training, operational assessment and risk analysis has resulted in crew working excessive hours when transiting the new locks. This, together with ACP's decision in

# MTWTU fights criminalisation of seafarers

The criminalisation of seafarers is a major problem that threatens not only Ukrainian mariners, but all those at sea anywhere. Oleg Grygoriuk, first vice chair of the Marine Transport Workers' Trade Union of Ukraine (MTWTU), introduces a new project his union has developed with the government to address the issue

To tackle the problem of criminalisation, the MTWTU co-ordinated its actions with the country's ministry of foreign affairs (MFA) to develop a project. Its twin aims are: to prevent seafarers' involvement in illegal activities at sea, and to ensure the protection of seafarers' rights to fair treatment during criminal proceedings, pre-trial detention and in penitentiary institutions.

As at October 2018, the MFA reported that 290 Ukrainian seafarers were detained in Greece only on suspicion of having committed criminal acts. The most frequent cause of detention is the transportation of illegal passengers or smuggled goods – drugs, cigarettes or fuel.

The proposed project will implement a number of activities aimed at strengthening bilateral co-operation between the authorities in Ukraine and in those countries where Ukrainian seafarers are detained.

The project is timely and relevant for Ukrainian seafarers but also has implications for all mariners. This was proved by the fact that it has gained the support of four United Nations agencies: the International Maritime Organization, the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. The project is also fully supported by the ITF and trade unions in many countries.

Unfortunately, currently there are no guidelines, handbooks or instructions for seafarers on:

- *how to identify the risks of being involved in criminal activities at sea;*
- *how to behave if a seafarer becomes aware of illegal passengers or smuggling on board;*
- and
- *when and how a seafarer should inform, without putting himself or herself at risk.*

That is why providing information is a very important element of the project. It will include a series of seminars for seafarers, production of short social media videos, interviews with experts and using the media. ■



## Asia seafaring nations lead moves on fair treatment of seafarers

In a significant move in November 2018, Asian seafaring nations pledged to lead the drive towards proper and effective implementation of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and International Labor Organization (ILO) agreed Guidelines on the Fair Treatment of Seafarers in the event of a maritime accident. The meeting was organised by Seafarers' Rights International, who will collaborate with the ITF on a programme to support the move and encourage other regions to follow suit.

June 2018 to remove the requirement for a third deckhand, fuelled the dispute.

The decision was conveyed to captains by email, and only when they were about to start their shifts. The captains did not feel it was safe to take the boats out for the towing service because they were so concerned about the safety implications, the lack of clarity about how to operate with a smaller crew, and the possible liability they would face if there were an accident.

The ACP responded by disciplining 22 captains for disobeying its directive and launched a vicious media attack on the ITF and unions for interfering in national

issues. It continued to refuse to engage with the ITF and UCOC. In July, it removed the requirement for a second tugboat captain on each vessel.

As a result, the ITF commissioned global fatigue expert Barry Strauch, supported by Isabel Gonzales, a prominent local occupational health doctor, to conduct a study on fatigue in the new locks. Their study aimed to provide information and raise awareness among canal operators, to ensure they understood the potential risk of accidents primarily because of fatigue, the lack of training and the poor quality of tug maintenance. The intention was that it would lead to a shift in ACP's attitudes and

behaviour and prompt it to engage with the UCOC.

The study's initial findings appeared to indicate that excessive working hours was the norm and that there were common mechanical incidents due to the design of the tugs. These factors seemed to be contributing to a dangerous increase in fatigue and stress-related conditions among tug captains.

The ITF and UCOC have warned the ACP that it needs to take these issues seriously, or there could be a serious accident that could even affect the navigability of the Panama Canal. We continue to work together to bring ACP to its senses. ■

# Maritime collaboration wins success in complex cases

## Catholic ministry on frontline to help seafarers

Director Father Bruno Ciceri describes how Apostleship of the Sea is on the frontline in assisting seafarers through a global network of chaplains and volunteers



AOS port chaplain Anne McLaren  
Credit: Maria Brosnan

Throughout the centuries in different ways and forms, the Catholic Church has always assisted the people of the sea.

Today, Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) has a global outreach in 55 countries and in more than 300 ports. Its 200 port chaplains and hundreds of volunteers visit over 70,000 ships a year and meet in excess of one million

seafarers, fishers and their families.

AOS chaplains and ship visitors are on the frontline as friendly and trusted people to rely on, especially when seafarers are facing problems and difficulties and are abandoned by everyone. They work closely with the ITF and the unions in ports to ensure that seafarers get all the assistance they need.

One example of this co-operation is the case of the *Malaviya Seven*, a supply boat detained in the Scottish port of Aberdeen in June 2016 after an inspection by the ITF discovered the 24 Indian members of the crew had not been paid the USD779,436 wages due to them. The shipowner then abandoned the vessel and the crew. Until January 2018, when the crew finally got paid and returned home, AOS chaplain Deacon Doug Duncan, assisted by his team of volunteers, helped by providing a generator to ensure heat and electricity on the ship, and made sure that the crew had food parcels, toiletries, and suitable winter clothing. According to their needs, crew members were taken to hospital or for a haircut, and to keep their spirits high as their ordeal dragged

on they were taken on visits to local tourist attractions.

On 1 October 2018 our chaplain Nicholas Barends at Cape Town, South Africa received a call from a Taiwanese fishing vessel. Two fishers from Tanzania complained of having been beaten and struck on various occasions at sea by the first officer. They feared for their lives and did not wish to continue working on that vessel. After a number of meetings with the skipper and mediation by the AOS chaplain, the two fishers received their pay arrears and USD2,000 as compensation for the abuse suffered, and were able to go home. On their own, they would not have been able to initiate discussions with the skipper and obtain justice.

AOS will continue working with maritime organisations to ensure seafarers in need are given the best possible support and care, while growing its valuable global network of chaplains and volunteers.

Read more about Apostleship of the Sea at [www.apostleshipofthesea.org.uk](http://www.apostleshipofthesea.org.uk). ■

# Local co-operation ends Osman Prince crew harassment

**ITF Croatia inspector Milko Kronja recalls the collaborative efforts needed to assist the crew of the Cormoros-flagged Osman Prince**

On 15 May 2018, shortly before the Osman Prince docked at Sibenik, Croatia, a crew member asked the ITF for help.

When we boarded the vessel, the 13 Syrian and eight Egyptian seafarers complained of unpaid wages, poor sanitary conditions, bad quality food and lack of rest. We questioned each one privately about the conditions he'd been offered before joining the vessel. This was to avoid them suffering further harassment by the first deck officer, who had apparently been the main source of problems on board and was also trying to find out who had contacted the ITF. The inspector found multiple employment contracts and calculated the amount that had to be paid to the crew.

A port state control (PSC) inspection revealed 17 shortcomings and the ship

was arrested for breaches of the Maritime Labour Convention. The situation on board deteriorated. The police had to be called when the first deck officer physically assaulted one of the crew. The master falsely told the police that the Egyptian seafarers had fled the ship and a three-hour search in Sibenik followed. During all this, the company did not contact the agent or the ITF and failed to react to the PSC detention. Nor did it respond to ITF demands for backpay owed to the crew.

Eventually, after the flag state representative had boarded, the Egyptians were offered USD3,000 between them, which they refused. Lengthy negotiations reached an acceptable solution – the crew would receive the contracted money, a total of USD10,469, and the rest of the calculated money was to

be deposited by the charterer with a public notary, to give the crew a chance to receive it through legal action against the shipping company.

If they hadn't accepted this, the entire amount claimed would have been deposited, the crew would have had no interim payment and the ship would have been allowed to leave the port. The crew could arrest the ship instead but the lawyer engaged by the Seafarers Union of Croatia advised this to be too risky: the ship was 34 years old, court proceedings take years, and debts could emerge which could mean they received nothing in the end.

The seafarers were paid the contracted money on board and returned home. Their legal battle for the outstanding money continues. ■

## Port state control assists ITF access to vessel

**The ITF received an anonymous complaint in relation to seafarers' wages and overtime on board the Koundouros in January 2018 but needed port state control assistance to access the berth in face of resistance. Keith McCorrison, ITF inspector Western Australia, tells us more**

When the Koundouros returned to Port Walcott, we experienced difficulties in accessing the berth. I warned that if I contacted the ship management or the master, some seafarers could be threatened with future non-employment or sent home. The complaint was serious enough to breach the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), so I got in touch with the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), the port state control.

It was agreed that I would get access to the vessel and be escorted by an AMSA Inspector. At 13:00 on the day of our visit I received a text from the ordinary seaman stating that he had been blamed for informing the ITF, taken off the ship and was to be repatriated the following day. He had been told by the management to write a letter requesting repatriation because of personal issues at home.

He was staying in the same motel as us in Karratha, so we met. He provided information about his wages and contract and said most of the crew were too frightened to complain. He didn't want to return to the ship.

The ITF and AMSA visited the ship and informed the master about the complaints. The ship is covered by an ITF-approved collective agreement but it seemed the ratings' monthly pay did not comply with the wage scales, overtime records were not recorded properly and the master couldn't produce the necessary wages documents. When we asked crew members to provide copies of their wage statements, they claimed to have accidentally thrown them away. Alarm bells were ringing. We suspected a conspiracy to hide the deficiencies from us.

After three hours of this, AMSA detained the ship for MLC breaches. The charterers expressed surprise, and suddenly the master found the requested documents. These proved that the monthly salaries were not being paid as required under the ITF agreement. The company claimed this was a misunderstanding and agreed to pay cash on board to those ratings owed wages.

The vessel is in anchorage and will be inspected again to determine that everything has been rectified. In the meantime, the shipowner claims this was an isolated case and is conducting a full investigation into the management of the vessel.

The ordinary seaman was repatriated and a compensation claim was settled with four months' full wages. ■

# ITF inspectors working for you

A seafarer in trouble anywhere in the world can call on an ITF inspector for help 24/7. On this page Seafarers' bulletin meets Steve Trowsdale, the first ITF inspectorate co-ordinator, and then profiles some of the 140-strong team of inspectors operating in 57 countries'



## Leading the inspectors

### What brought you to the ITF?

In 1999 I was working for an IT company and became a full-time consultant to the ITF. In 2004, I was offered the opportunity to join the ITF and take responsibility for the development and training of the inspectorate. A later review of the inspectorate role and support mechanisms recommended the creation of a position (inspectorate co-ordinator) to monitor and manage the inspectorate, to which I was appointed in 2015.

### What are you responsible for?

I'm responsible for the operational performance of all the ITF co-ordinators, inspectors and contacts. I co-ordinate their recruitment, training, ongoing development and assessment to ensure that each one is doing their job effectively.

I lead a team of nine people in the ITF head office – a maritime assistant, HIV/AIDS & wellbeing co-ordinator and the seven people

who are the inspectorate/seafarers support team, who deal with individual seafarer cases and support the inspectorate. We run union awareness seminars to assist ITF affiliates to recruit new members by making seafarers more aware of the benefits of union membership and their rights on board. We've run six of these seminars so far and plan a further three in 2019.

I'm also involved in building external relationships – with maritime academies to get HIV/AIDS onto the training curriculums and with governments and maritime authorities in the Arab World region & Iran so that we are better placed to assist seafarers.

**How do you recruit and train new inspectors?**  
When a new or replacement inspector post becomes available, we notify all maritime affiliates in the specific country, as each

candidate must be endorsed by an affiliated union. I interview every candidate, alongside an experienced co-ordinator/inspector and sometimes a trade union representative. What I'm looking for is an understanding of the role, knowledge of trade unions and the ITF, and, crucially, passion for the job.

As part of their induction programme, we bring successful candidates to London for a month's training and then they spend time gaining practical experience alongside an inspector in a European port.

**Aside from responding to calls for help, what else do inspectors do?**

Responding to calls for help is always the first priority for inspectors. But they spend approximately 60 percent of their time carrying out routine inspections of vessels in port – and the rest of their time on vessels

which have had previous problems, those without an ITF agreement and vessels which haven't been inspected before.

**What do you think is the biggest challenge inspectors face?**

There are a number of challenges to the inspectorate, but abandonment continues to be a major problem. It is not going away and accounts for an increasing number of calls for help. Our growing presence on social media has made seafarers much more aware that the ITF is here to assist them and therefore we are receiving more requests for assistance.

**What do you like most about your job?**

The sense of satisfaction in seeing our inspectors and the seafarers support team doing their jobs effectively and the messages of thanks and support from seafarers who have been successfully assisted by them. ■

## Introducing the ITF's newest recruits



**Yoshihiro Toyomitsu**  
(Tokyo, Japan)

has worked for the All Japan Seamen's Union for 15 years. During that time he has been involved in international union activities and in the administrative office. He is determined as an inspector to do his best to protect seafarers' rights and win decent work to make seafaring a more attractive job.



**José Ramirez P**  
(Manzanillo, Mexico)

has a seafaring past. Between 2002 and 2016 he worked around the world with multinational crews on board coastal ships and ocean-going vessels as a cadet. He now works for the OCPNRM union. He chose to be an inspector so that he can help improve conditions for crews on ships visiting Mexico. He also wants to build and improve relationships with genuine local and national trade unions.



**Koen Keehnen**  
(Rotterdam, Netherlands)

became an assistant inspector in July 2018 after 36 years as a docker in the port of Rotterdam. He was a union member from the start, and in 2012 was elected as dockers council secretary in the dockers' union FNV Havens. Koen jumped at the chance to be part of the ITF inspectorate. It gives him the best of both worlds: Koen loves being able to help seafarers directly and to witness their gratitude, while continuing to be part of a transport union operating worldwide to fight for the rights of the working class.



**Livia Martini**  
(Genoa, Italy – assistant to ITF co-ordinator, Italy)

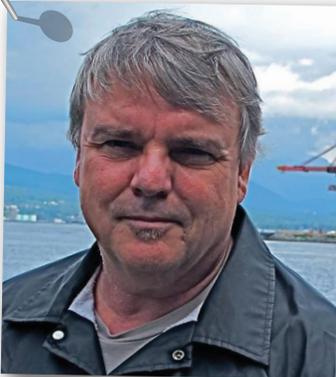
is 29 years old. Her career began as a cadet aged 19. For 10 years she worked on cruise ships before achieving the position of second officer with a chief mate's licence. In March 2018 she joined the FIT-CISL Union and was appointed as an ITF inspector. She's finding the role very interesting, because as a former seafarer she wants to help others as much as possible to defend their rights. She describes the maritime industry as the 'job of my life'.

# Spotlight on the Canada team

Any seafarer who has sailed there knows that Canada is a large country with extremely long coast lines and sometimes remote ports. You may have experienced the extreme winter weather conditions that present hazards to seafarers. Thankfully, Canada's ITF Inspectors are strategically located to cover the country and co-ordinate their work, in order to deliver support and services to the world's seafarers.

The Canada team work closely with their port state control (PSC) officers enforcing the Maritime Labour Convention. In fact, Canada was the first country to detain a ship under the MLC, just two days after it came into force in 2013. Shipowners know that the team mean business when they raise seafarers' complaints.

## Meet the team:



### Peter Lahay

is based in Vancouver, from where he covers Canada's west coast and co-ordinates the Canadian team. He joined the ITF 25 years ago. Since then he has assisted countless seafarers and their families in cases of abandonment, horrific conditions, stolen wages, personal injury, death and general human rights matters. Peter has led campaigns for seafarers' rights and also trains new ITF Inspectors.



### Vince Giannopolous

covers the Saint Lawrence Seaway and Great Lakes. He is based in Montreal but spends a lot of time on the road defending seafarers in one of the world's largest operational areas for inspectors. Since joining the ITF five years ago at the age of 23, Vince has developed incredible skills for problem solving, developed strong relationships with PSC officers and has led the fight on cabotage in Canada. He also concentrates on lashing issues and their impact on seafarer safety.



### Karl Risser

covers the Atlantic Coast, including Newfoundland. Karl has been with the ITF for four years, after leading Canada's largest shipyard workers union. Karl is a natural leader and fighter for workers' rights. Karl recently led a global 18-month campaign against a large container shipping company that refused to sign ITF collective agreements. The company finally changed its position – as a result, 500 seafarers now enjoy pay raises of up to 55 percent and new conditions protecting them and their families.

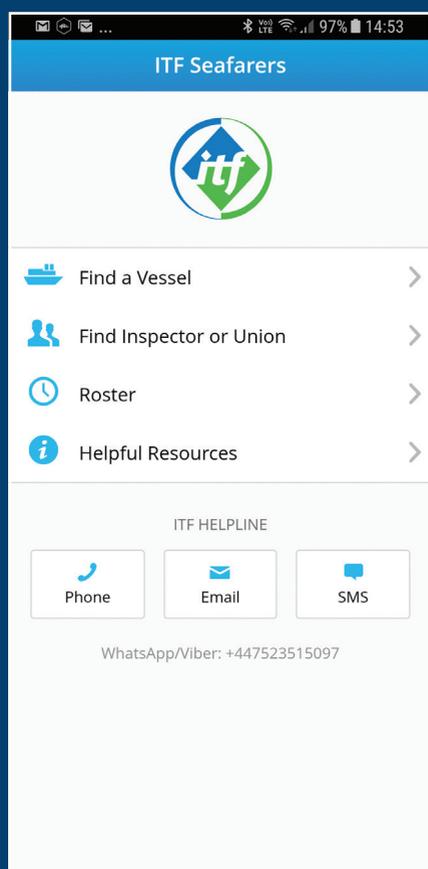


### Nathan Smith

is the newest member of the team and also covers Canada's west coast, providing support and cover for Peter as an official ITF contact. In his first year, Nathan has proved to be tenacious – he has been known to sit on a ship for more than a day without leaving, to get the right result. He has had numerous ships detained by PSC and is a fighter in the truest sense of the word.

Your eight-page pullout guide

# YOUR ITF GUIDE TO GETTING HELP



## How to find a maritime union or ITF inspector

Your first point of contact should be your union – if you are not a member, find out how to join one. If you need help straight away, or if you're a union member having difficulty getting hold of your union, contact an ITF inspector – all contact details can be found in this guide.

You can check ITF-affiliated unions on [www.itfseafarers.org](http://www.itfseafarers.org) – click the tab Find an Inspector or Union.

If you have a mobile phone or tablet download your FREE ITF Seafarers app now at [www.itfseafarers.org/seafarer-apps.cfm](http://www.itfseafarers.org/seafarer-apps.cfm)

- Find contact details for the nearest ITF inspector, co-ordinator or union
- Look up a ship and check conditions on board before you sign on
- Check that your hours of rest are in line with regulations

Download a free QR code on your SmartPhone and then scan this code.



Available on



## How to contact the ITF

SMS +44 7984356573

WhatsApp/Viber +44 7523515097

Email [seafsupport@itf.org.uk](mailto:seafsupport@itf.org.uk)

## Before you contact the ITF

Have the relevant information ready using the following checklist:

### About you

- Name
- Position on board
- Nationality
- Contact details

### About the ship

- Name
- Flag
- IMO number
- Current location
- Number of crew and nationality

### About the problem

- Describe the problem
- How long have you been on board?
- Are all the crew experiencing the same problem?

## Seafarers' centres

Seafarers' centres provide advice, someone to talk to, facilities to contact home and a place where you can relax away from the ship.

To find a seafarers' centre near you download the FREE Shoreleave app at:

[www.itfseafarers.org/seafarer-apps.cfm](http://www.itfseafarers.org/seafarer-apps.cfm)

Available on   



[www.facebook.com/itfseafarerssupport](http://www.facebook.com/itfseafarerssupport)

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SMS Textline: +44 7984356573

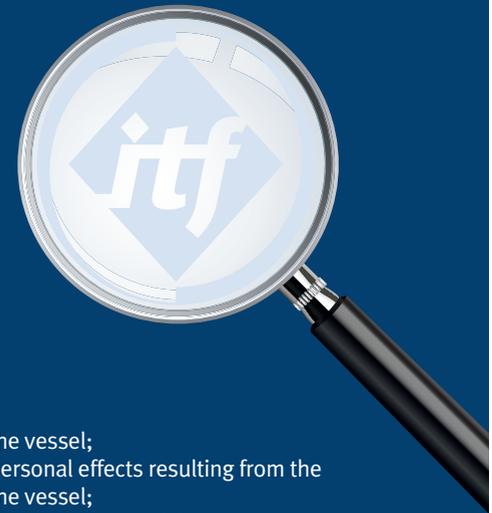
[www.itfseafarers.org](http://www.itfseafarers.org) #ITFseafarers

## Getting hired Crewing agents

The Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 says that private crewing agencies must be regulated. It prohibits: the charging of fees to seafarers for finding positions on board; the making of illegal deductions from wages; and the practice of blacklisting individuals. Shipowners must make sure the crewing agents they use meet these standards.

## Before you sign a contract ITF advice on your contract to work at sea

The best guarantee of proper conditions of employment at sea is to only sign a contract drawn up in accordance with an ITF-approved collective agreement. Failing that, here is a checklist to follow.



- Don't start work on a ship without having a **written contract**.
- Never sign a blank contract, or a contract that binds you to any terms and conditions that are **not specified** or that you are not familiar with.
- Check if the contract you are signing refers to a **collective bargaining agreement** (CBA). If so, make sure that you are fully aware of the terms of that CBA, and keep a copy of it along with your contract.
- Make sure that the **duration of the contract** is clearly stated.
- Don't sign a contract that allows for alterations to be made to the **contractual period** at the sole discretion of the shipowner. Any change to the agreed duration of the contract should be by mutual consent.
- Always ensure that the contract clearly states the **basic wages** payable and make sure that the **basic working hours** are clearly defined (for example 40, 44 or 48 per week). The International Labour Organization (ILO) states that basic working hours should be a maximum of 48 per week (208 per month).
- Make sure that the contract clearly stipulates how **overtime** will be paid and at what rate. There could be a flat hourly rate payable for all hours worked in excess of the basic. Or there may be a monthly fixed amount for a guaranteed number of overtime hours, in which case the rate for any hours worked beyond the guaranteed overtime should be clearly stated. The ILO states that all overtime hours should be paid at a minimum of 1.25 x the normal hourly rate.
- Make sure that the contract clearly states how many days' **paid leave** per month you will get. The ILO states that paid leave should not be less than 30 days per year (2.5 days per calendar month).
- Make certain that the payments for basic wages, overtime and leave are clearly and **separately itemised** in the contract.
- Check that your contract states that you are entitled to the costs of your **repatriation**. Never sign a contract that contains any clause stating that you are responsible for paying any portion of joining or repatriation expenses.
- Don't sign a contract that allows the shipowner to withhold or retain any portion of your wages during the period of the contract. You should be entitled to **full payment of wages** earned at the end of each calendar month.
- Be aware that an individual employment contract will not always include details of **additional benefits**. Therefore, try to obtain confirmation (preferably in the form of a written agreement or contractual entitlement) of what compensation will be payable in the event of:
  - sickness or injury during the contractual period;
  - death (amount payable to next of kin);
- loss of the vessel;
- loss of personal effects resulting from the loss of the vessel;
- premature termination of the contract.
- Don't sign a contract that contains any clause that restricts your right to join, contact, consult with or be represented by a **trade union of your choice**.
- Ensure that you are given and retain a **copy of the contract** you have signed.
- Check the conditions for terminating your contract, including how much **notice** the shipowner must give you to terminate your contract.
- Remember... whatever the terms and conditions, any contract/agreement that you enter into voluntarily would, in most jurisdictions, be considered **legally binding**.

To find out if your ship is covered by a ITF-approved agreement, go to [itf.seafarers.org](http://itf.seafarers.org) and click the tab 'Look Up a Ship'.

Use the new ITF Seafarer App for mobiles and tablets to look up a ship:  
[www.itfseafarers.org/seafarer-apps.cfm](http://www.itfseafarers.org/seafarer-apps.cfm)

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3

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# Standing up for your rights

## Read this first

**The ITF is committed to assisting seafarers serving on flag of convenience ships to get just wages and proper collective agreement coverage.**

**Sometimes seafarers have to resort to legal action in local courts. On other occasions boycott action may be taken against a ship. Different actions are right for different places. The right action in one country may very well be wrong in another.**

**Contact the local representative of the ITF for guidance. You will find contact email addresses and phone numbers in the centre of this bulletin. You should also seek local legal advice before you take any action.**

**In some countries, the law actually works against you and your fellow crew members if**

**you take strike action, and in such a case, the local ITF union representatives will explain this to you.**

**In many more countries, the key to winning a dispute is strike action. Once again, this depends on the local advice you receive. You have the legal right to strike in many countries, so long as your ship is in port and not at sea.**

**In any strike action it is important to remember to remain disciplined, peaceful and united. And remember, the right to strike is a basic human right guaranteed, in many countries, by the law or constitution.**

**Whatever you choose to do, don't forget to talk to the local ITF representatives before you take any action. Working together, we can win the battle for justice and basic rights.**

## Maritime accidents

There are international guidelines to ensure seafarers are treated fairly if their ship is involved in a maritime accident – whether by the shipowners, the port, the coastal state, the flag state or their own country's laws. Here are your rights if this happens to you:

- You have the right to a lawyer. Ask for one before answering any questions or making any statements, since these could be used against you in any future legal case.
- You must be able to understand what's being said – ask the authorities to stop the questioning if you don't understand. If you have difficulties because of the language being used, ask for an interpreter.
- Your company has an obligation to assist you – contact your company and/or union for advice and assistance.

More information at: [www.itfseafarers.org/your\\_legal\\_rights.cfm](http://www.itfseafarers.org/your_legal_rights.cfm)

# It's a scam!

If you've just received a job offer out of the blue that's too good to be true, it's a scam, warns ITF seafarers section assistant secretary Fabrizio Barcellona

If you receive an unsolicited job offer by email, then think before you do anything. Was it from a well-known shipping or cruise company? Are the wages more than you've ever dreamed of? Then it's a scam.

Recruitment frauds targeting seafarers – and particularly people wanting to work in the cruise industry – have snowballed. The fraudsters set up their own website, typically using a genuine company name and logo, then spread the word by direct emails, adverts and free listings.

Once you accept the fake job offer they'll ask for a 'one-off' fee. Maybe towards the cost of transport to the ship, a visa fee, an administration cost. This is automatically a scam because requesting agency fees from a seafarer to obtain any position on board is illegal under the Maritime Labour Convention.

Don't pay the scammers anything. They'll keep coming back for more, promising this is the last time – and warning that if you don't make one final contribution you'll lose what you've already paid. They won't stop until they've bled you dry.

Even if you start to take up an offer but refuse to pay that first fee, they'll probably have asked for your name, date of birth, home address and a scan of your passport. They can use these for identity theft. If you've provided your bank account details, notify your bank immediately, or your account will be emptied.

Scamming is low risk and low cost. The fraudsters' home countries don't prosecute (they're never really based in countries like the UK, USA and Australia).

#### What can you do?

Walk away. Don't hand over your personal details. If you've paid anything, stop now.

Check out any job offer. Delete it if it came by email and was unsolicited, and warn your friends. Be equally careful of job offers on what pretend to be shipping or recruitment company websites and of fake jobs on real websites, especially those that have free-to-post job listings and adverts.

If you're looking for work, visit the websites of real cruise lines and big-name shipping companies. Look for warnings on the site and contact the real headquarters if you're in any doubt.

**If you're in doubt about a job offer you have received, you can email the ITF at [jobscam@itf.org.uk](mailto:jobscam@itf.org.uk) for their advice.**

## Common signs of scams

- Any unsolicited job offer
- Any request for money at any time for anything
- Any request for bank details
- Any request to provide scans of personal documents, such as passport or qualifications
- A mobile telephone number, especially if it's the main contact for a supposed office
- Email addresses from free providers such as gmail, globomail, Yahoo
- Email addresses where the country domain differs from the office's supposed location
- Misspelt and ungrammatical messages

# Abandonment: maritime's shame

A vast number of national and international seafarers are known to be victims of abandonment. The ITF works to resolve this issue, focusing on areas such as repatriation, unpaid wages and basic living supplies for abandoned seafarers. We collaborate closely with United Nations agencies, national administrations, international organisations, shipping companies, shipowners and manning agencies. *Seafarers' bulletin* looks at how the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 gives the ITF and unions greater leverage to tackle this scourge on the industry and highlights a shocking case of abandonment in Oman

## ITF assists crews abandoned in Oman

Some of the most dreadful cases of abandonment occur in the Arab World region. But, says ITF inspector Mohamed Arrachedi, the repeated behaviour of Venous Shipping is the worst he's come across

Venous Shipping is already banned from operating in UAE waters because of its abandonment of three vessels – the Al-Nouf, City Elite and Beta. But that hasn't stopped it and as a result the ITF was asked to assist 16 Indian seafarers abandoned for over four months in 2018.

The crew members were given jobs by Al Noor al Satee Marine Services and were to join ships in Omani ports. Shortly after they boarded in August 2018, they were abandoned. Their accommodation was of a very poor standards, they were short of provisions and had not been paid a single dollar in four months.

The ITF had already assisted abandoned crew on these ships in 2016 and 2017 so we were shocked to see the same story unfold again, just with different crew members.

As the illustration (right) shows, they were then moved from vessel to vessel while

desperate to leave and return to their homes. Eventually, after a lot of effort, we managed to enable the 16 seafarers to disembark on 6

November and hope to repatriate them soon. Their story has not ended though, as the owner is still refusing to pay them. ■



# P&I Clubs play crucial role when seafarers are abandoned

If you're abandoned or injured at work, an insurer or other security provider will issue the financial security that shipowners must have available to crew to meet your financial claims. Jonathan Hare, chairman of the International Group compulsory insurance committee, explains more

Eighty-eight countries have ratified the MLC, representing 91 percent of the world fleet by tonnage. This significant achievement is a testament to the political will of those governments and the International Labour Organization (ILO) process that brings governments, employers and unions together to shape maritime policy.

Under the MLC, shipowners must provide evidence of financial security to cover their liabilities for personal injury and other claims by seafarers. These must include the payment of up to four months' unpaid wages and other related costs where the shipowner has failed to discharge its obligations under a seafarers' employment agreement or other contractual agreement.

The International Group of P&I Clubs (IG) is made up of the 13 marine third party liability insurers that owners of 95 percent of the world's fleet rely on to meet these MLC requirements. In 2016 the IG Clubs introduced new rules and insurance structures that led to the financial security certificates that shipowners now have to display on board their vessels.

The IG recently collaborated in the training of new ITF inspectors, including the effective handling of personal injury claims. This

provided an opportunity to exchange views on issues that could delay the prompt repatriation of seafarers following an abandonment.

We found that some jurisdictions were reluctant to allow abandoned seafarers to leave the ship without imposing conditions on their release, such as insisting that a replacement crew board the ship before the abandoned crew is allowed to leave.

Under the MLC, a state must facilitate the prompt repatriation of crew who have been abandoned in their jurisdiction. Yet states frequently do not fully co-operate with the repatriation process. It is vital that the ITF and other parties report such cases to the ILO and International Maritime Organization (IMO).

By working collaboratively with the maritime industry and the ILO, we should witness changes in perception and behaviour in some states. And with a continued focus on the welfare of seafarers, these issues should dissipate over time.

By autumn 2018 the IG had collectively responded to 32 abandonment cases. Clubs will continue to work proactively with the ITF and others to enable the prompt repatriation of abandoned crew members. ■

## International Group of P&I clubs

- The Swedish Club - [www.swedishclub.com](http://www.swedishclub.com)
- UK P&I Club - [www.epandi.com](http://www.epandi.com)
- Skuld - [www.skuld.com](http://www.skuld.com)
- Britannia - [www.britanniapandi.com](http://www.britanniapandi.com)
- Steamship Mutual - [www.steamshipmutual.com](http://www.steamshipmutual.com)
- Gard - [www.gard.no](http://www.gard.no)
- The London P&I Club - [www.londonpandi.com](http://www.londonpandi.com)
- West of England - [www.westpandi.com](http://www.westpandi.com)
- North - [www.nepia.com](http://www.nepia.com)
- Shipowners - [www.shipownersclub.com](http://www.shipownersclub.com)
- The Standard - [www.standard-club.com](http://www.standard-club.com)
- The American Club - [www.american-club.com](http://www.american-club.com)
- The Japan Shipowners' Mutual Protection & Indemnity Association - [www.piclub.or.jp](http://www.piclub.or.jp)



# Alert to abandoned seafarers: act fast or risk losing out!

If you think you may be abandoned, it's crucial that you make your complaint and contact the insurer as soon as possible. Otherwise, explains ITF inspectorate co-ordinator Steve Trowsdale, you may lose out financially



Financial security to protect seafarers who have been abandoned is compulsory for all vessels flying a flag that has ratified the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) 2006 or is trading in ports where the MLC applies. Shipowners must have a form of insurance, directly accessible to crews, with sufficient funds to provide timely financial assistance in the event of abandonment. This means no more seafarers left for months on end with no food, no wages and no way to get home.

Manning agents and seafarers should check that a vessel has valid abandonment insurance before signing on. And think twice before signing a contract if the certification cannot be confirmed.

The certificate of financial security must be conspicuously displayed on board in English. It will be called 'Certificate of Insurance or Other Financial Security in Respect of Seafarer Repatriation Costs and Liabilities as Required under Regulation 2.5.2, Standard A2.5.2 of the Maritime Labour Convention 2006 as Amended'.

You can check that the certification is still valid by looking up your vessel on the website of the P&I club or insurer named on the certificate.

If you think you are at risk of abandonment, or haven't been paid for two months or more and want to be repatriated, don't wait too long to act. Make a complaint and directly contact the insurer, or ask the ITF to apply on your behalf.

The insurance will cover you for up to four months' outstanding wages and other entitlements as per your employment agreement or collective bargaining agreement. That's why it's important not to leave it too late. If you wait six months to apply, you'll only get four months' back-pay.

The insurance must also cover all reasonable expenses, including adequate food, clothing where necessary, accommodation, drinking water, essential fuel for survival on board and any necessary medical care, plus repatriation costs ('appropriate and expeditious' travel, normally by air, and all reasonable journey costs, such as food, accommodation and transport of personal effects). It will apply from the moment of abandonment to arrival back home. ■

## You can claim insurance if the shipowner:

- fails to cover the cost of your repatriation; or
- has left you without the necessary maintenance and support; or
- has otherwise unilaterally severed their ties with you, including failure to pay contractual wages for a period of at least two months.

## ITF brings abandonment to international forum

On 24 April 2018, an ITF delegation delivered a groundbreaking presentation on the human cost of abandonment during the 105th session of the legal committee at the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

The ITF presentation was the first on seafarer abandonment to be delivered to the meeting. It focused on the latest data analysis of the IMO and International Labour Organization (ILO) database on reported incidents of abandonment of seafarers. The presentation and outline of the ITF's ongoing work were highly appreciated by the member states and organisations.

Branko Berlan, ITF representative to the IMO, said: "The ITF Inspectorate and local affiliates have been doing their best to mitigate these extreme situations. However, more port states and flag states need to take a more proactive role, and at the IMO we stressed the paramount need for all present to fulfil their obligations and show solidarity in action to improve seafarers' welfare and rights.

"We appreciated the expressions of interest and genuine willingness to co-operate with the ITF in the interests of seafarers."

# Spotlight on the cruise industry

For many people, crew on cruise ships are the most visible seafarers because they are the ones making passengers' holidays an experience to remember and treasure.

*Seafarers' bulletin* finds out what it's like for the crew and what the future holds

## Behind the scenes on a cruise ship

Is working on a cruise ship as glamorous as it might seem? Livia Martini, Assistant to ITF co-ordinator, Italy, draws on her experience as a deck officer in the industry to shine a light on the reality of life on board



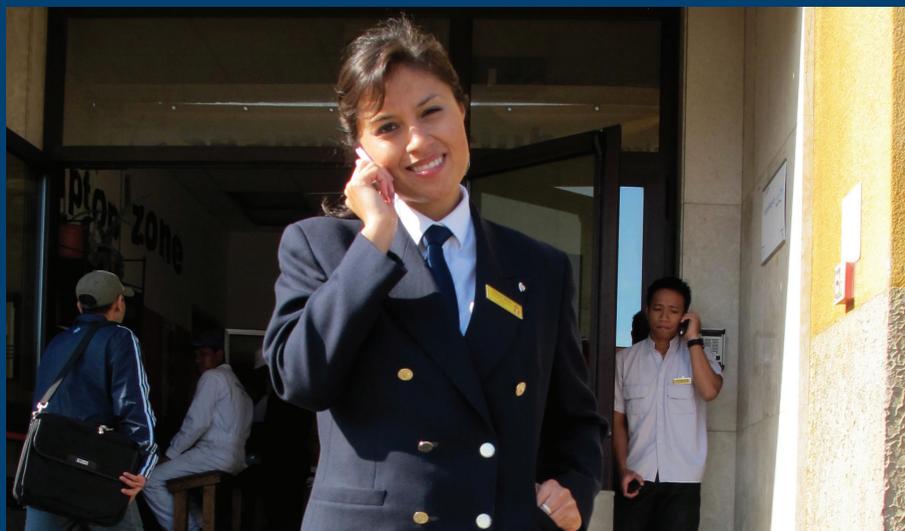
When I was 16, and I thought of working on passenger vessels, the only thing I dreamt about was the possibility of being in a different place of the world every day. Well, this is what most people think about working on a cruise ship! In reality, to work on a giant floating hotel employing over 1,000 people on average you must love your job from the depths of your heart.

Why is this? Well, the pay is good and I was always paid on time. But you're working for many months away from home, with people of many different cultures, in places with different time zones maybe every 10 days. On top of this, there's the responsibility that every single crew member has once he or she steps onto a cruise ship.

As well as carrying out your regular job, you must also be ready to take care of your

# Rapid expansion poses challenges for crew

The cruise ship industry is growing fast, with bigger and better ships continually on the horizon. Fabrizio Barcellona, seafarers section assistant secretary, looks at what this means for crew



It is hard to keep pace with the ever-bigger vessels entering the cruise market. The largest to date (the Symphony of the Seas, launched in April 2018) can carry more than 6,500 passengers with a crew of 2,200.

This rapid expansion throws up challenges for crew. The ITF represents seafarers on bodies such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) which set global standards for employment conditions, recruitment, training and safety at sea. The ITF and the affiliated unions are working to ensure that employers meet these standards, and that they emphasise skills training and professionalism to recruit and retain crew.

In 2018, the ITF conducted a survey to provide a snapshot of the industry. It revealed that some 340,000 members of ITF unions are employed on cruise vessels – nearly one third of the 850,000 seafarers represented by ITF unions working across the entire maritime industry.

Four key trade unions sign most of the cruise agreements for crew members across the ship companies – the Norwegian Seafarers' Union (NSU), FIT-CISL in Italy, Nautilus International and ver.di in Germany.

Seafarers from some 161 nationalities make up the crew of cruise ships worldwide. The biggest numbers by far come from the Philippines (over 81,000), followed by India (nearly 37,000) and Indonesia (30,000).

Visits to cruise ships by ITF inspectors reveal a good overall balance of men and women working on board. On the hotel side of cruise ships, men and women tend to do the same jobs. Differences emerge when it comes to the nautical crew, where men dominate.

Sadly, seafarers hoping to work on cruise ships are a particular target of scam recruiters – crewing agents and websites who ask for money to get you a job on board or for the necessary training. Read about how to protect yourself on page 8 of the pullout guide. ■

passengers in case of emergency. Each crew member has an emergency duty, and has to practice this at least once a week, maybe even during their rest period.

Consider also that the cruise ship is alive 24/7 – the deck, engine, galley and electrotechnical departments operate at all times, alongside every aspect of providing hotel and medical services.

As a deck officer I worked 10 hours a day. Being on watch means that you eat at different times of the day, and sometimes just once a day. You get free meals in the officers' mess or the self-service restaurant. One of the perks of the job is being able to unwind in the pool and gym for crew.

While passengers are there for a wonderful holiday, the people who provide all the services

for them have to live on the ship for eight or nine months at a time. Instead of enjoying luxury suites with a sea view balcony, the crew stay in small cabins. As a cadet for 12 months I had to share mine with another cadet. As she was working a different shift from me, this was difficult in terms of privacy and rest.

For me, the best thing about my job was the thrill of driving a cruise ship and putting my years of study into practice. I saw many places and made lots of friends from completely different nationalities and backgrounds. The worst aspect of the job is the feeling that you are simply a number.

The cruise ship industry is growing enormously, so it's only right that we pay more attention to the human beings who make these great experiences happen for passengers. ■

# New counselling service supports thousands of Indian seafarer families

The high demand for a new union counselling programme has shown the scale of stress and depression among Indian seafarers and their families. Dr Syed Asif Altaf, ITF global wellbeing programme co-ordinator, and Abdulgani Serang, general secretary of the National Union of Seafarers of India, report



All seafarers know that the ship is a highly demanding work environment. It's also home for months at a time but away from families and often with little or no access to information, counselling or medical services. These factors affect seafarers' mental health and can lead to stress and depression.

There is growing evidence of an emerging crisis.

An ITF global survey in all the major seafaring supply countries in 2015 found that nearly 50 percent of the 614 respondents said they were depressed sometimes or often; and very significant numbers reported that they had considered suicide – in the Philippines, 41 percent of seafarers knew work mates who had considered suicide. According to internal claims figures from the UK P&I Club, deaths by suicide among seafarers more than tripled from 4.4 percent in 2014 to 15.3 percent in 2015.

Yet seafarers' mental wellbeing is still seen as

a taboo subject and the maritime industry is responding very slowly.

Some employers have started tele-counselling services for crew but confidentiality and trust issues prevent seafarers from seeking help. Often, they are reluctant to talk about their mental health and seek necessary support because they are afraid of losing their jobs and being blacklisted.

The National Union of Seafarers of India (NUSI) has long advocated for improved mental health for seafarers globally. In March 2017, it launched its flagship programme NUSI SAHARA – sahara is a local Hindi word which means support.

The 24/7 free telephone and internet-based helpline service provides one-to-one counselling to all Indian seafarers and their families by specially trained psychologists and counsellors. It aims to improve mental wellbeing and manage stress at the earliest

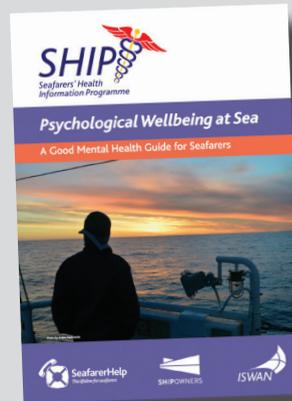
possible opportunity before it worsens.

During its first 18 months, NUSI SAHARA received 709 phone calls – around 69 percent from seafarers, the rest from family members. This demand for the service confirms that the mental health of family members is also adversely affected by seafarers' long absences from home.

Of the callers to the helpline, almost 69 percent reported experiencing stress and anxiety. Some 54 percent of calls concerned problems related to management at work, while 35 percent were about family and personal relationships. Disturbingly, 20 percent of seafarers were suffering from stress because of harassment, conflict and even extreme physical violence by co-workers.

NUSI SAHARA also runs workshops in its office and at a seafarers' hostel in Mumbai to help seafarers and their families mitigate stress and learn effective coping strategies and practical

## ISWAN guide for seafarers' mental health and wellbeing



In October 2018, ISWAN (International Seafarers' Welfare and Assistance Network) published in more languages its self-help guide for seafarers worried about their mental health and wellbeing.

*Psychological wellbeing at sea*, originally published in English, is now available in Arabic, Chinese, Filipino, Hindi, Russian and Spanish.

The guide, written by a consultant clinical psychologist, provides seafarers with straightforward, practical tips on how to recognise the risks to wellbeing and how to enhance your wellbeing, despite the many challenges of life at sea.

ISWAN has also launched a free training package, in association with KVH Videotel. *Seafarers' mental health and wellbeing* covers several topics and points you to where you can find support.

*Psychological wellbeing at sea* can be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/2qluFLM>, and *Seafarers' mental health and wellbeing* can be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/2PE8VsG>.



techniques to deal with stress. So far, 4,500 participants have attended 160 workshops.

Work demands and the struggle to manage a home-work balance clearly play a role in causing and exacerbating mental health problems. But the highest prevalence of stress and anxiety – reported by 69 percent of those who used the counselling service – is caused by factors associated with seafarers' personal and professional dissatisfaction.

Several thousand seafarers and their families have accessed counselling support already in the first 18 months of the SAHARA programme. We hope that assisting them to find help easily will improve both their quality of life and productivity at work.

The ITF will be working with unions in different transport sectors on how the SAHARA model and programme can be replicated for all types of transport workers who experience stress and depression. ■

### Five top tips for good mental health at sea:

1. Do more of what makes you happy – whatever you enjoy, plan time to do it.
2. Think about what you have to be grateful for – and thank people who have made a positive difference to your life in some way.
3. Nurture family relationships by agreeing before you leave home how much and how often you can realistically contact each other.
4. Take part in communal activities, such as movie nights or multi-player computer games.
5. Keep physically fit and healthy through regular exercise, a balanced diet and proper rest periods.



## ITF Arab World network expanding rapidly

**The ITF's Arab World and Iran network continues to develop a stronger structure of union contacts and new inspectors in a region where seafarers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Few Arab World nations have ratified the Maritime Labour Convention and unions are either non-existent in many of these countries or operate in a difficult environment. Network co-ordinator Mohamed Arrachedi brings you up to date**

The number of seafarers requesting assistance in the Arab World region and Iran is increasing, so we continue to build and consolidate capacity for the ITF and its affiliated unions to respond effectively.

That's why we are identifying and developing more contacts in more countries. Contacts are experienced, named people in ITF-affiliated unions with maritime knowledge and English language skills who can assist seafarers with a wide range of problems and work with maritime authorities to resolve cases.

Since the network was launched in January 2017, it has grown to 20 contacts in eight countries, including a team in Iran of six members of ITF-affiliated IMMS, who cover all Iranian ports. It will shortly expand to 24 contacts in 10 countries. We are currently working to appoint new contacts to cover six new ports (three in Oman, two in Morocco and Sfax in Tunisia), three contacts to cover

each of the key ports in Yemen (Hodeidah, Mukalla, Mukha), and one in Port Sudan.

The ITF is providing training and education for its unions in the region so that they feel better equipped and more willing to establish relationships with key actors in the industry, such as government agencies and the maritime authorities. We are also assisting ITF unions to collaborate more, so they can become stronger together and assist each other in approaching practical challenges, such as collective bargaining. Several unions have already signed their own ITF agreements covering their seafarers working on national companies' and FOC ships, while some have signed joint agreements with other ITF unions.

An important activity has been to run a series of seminars – six to date – jointly with maritime administrations and transport ministries in the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and

Oman to strengthen their knowledge of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) and ultimately to encourage more countries in the region to ratify the MLC.

These seminars – and the one we ran in November 2018 in Turkey for the IMMS team from Iran – help to share skills and best practice in responding to seafarers in distress in the region. Between January 2017 and September 2018, the ITF and its contacts have responded to crew in 159 cases, many of them chronic abandonment cases, and recovered over USD1.8 million in owed wages. The biggest backpay cases include the St Vincent-flagged Fatima in Libya, the Panama-flagged Goodman in UAE, the Togo-flagged Freedom in Algeria and the Bahrain-flagged Avonmore in Morocco.

**Several of our cases involve crew abandoned for very long periods of time – read the Oman abandonment story on page 19. ■**

# Technological developments will not replace seafarers

**Captain Kuba Szymanski, secretary general of InterManager, the international trade association for the ship and crew management sector, shares his thoughts on the future for seafarers**

The World Maritime Day at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in September 2018 provided a golden opportunity for me to ask the world's 'top brass' the probing question: what is the future for us seafarers?

The answer was very encouraging – we are needed! People cannot imagine shipping without us, and it will be a long time before we will see unmanned vessels, though we may see autonomous ships before then.

So, what is the hype all about? Well, some in our industry are waking up to the idea of 'the internet of things' which comes hand-in-hand with 'big data' and the appetite of technology companies to expand their influence to the terra nova or, in this case, aqua nova – shipping.

We seafarers are responsible for serious assets – at least 90 percent of all goods carried globally and the cleanest form of transport. Shipping has grown by 100 percent over the past 10 years. We are now sailing 90,000-plus SOLAS ships!

We keep these assets moving and we keep them maintained. Those who blame us for disasters caused by the dreaded human error completely forget how many times daily we prevent serious disasters. Yet, whenever I mention that I hear: "well this is what we pay you for!"

Fine, I am happy to be paid to avert disasters. And as soon as technology can help we will be able to achieve even better results. The air industry has already made this jump. Pilots just fly the plane – they do not do

payrolls, victualling accounts or even planned maintenance.

I wait impatiently for the time in maritime when a navigator will start navigating, an engineer will start engineering, and the technology, which is supposed to make ships autonomous, will do all the bureaucratic nonsense for us.

Imagine: no arrival messages; no arrival paperwork for customs, immigration and police; no agents! Or maybe a lot of agents taking care of the silly stuff in port, leaving seafarers to look after the ships.

There may be new roles on board, utilising IT and more technically skilled to look after the increasingly sophisticated equipment. On deck, I can see a role for operators responsible for supervising technology, resetting computers and helping computers when they get stuck.

But our experience and knowledge is extremely difficult to replace. So let's not give up yet. ■

## Captain Szymanski: career

Captain Szymanski started his sea career in 1985 as a deck officer on gas and chemical tankers, becoming a master in 1999. After several roles ashore, he joined InterManager as secretary general in 2010. His many qualifications include a Certificate in Ship Superintendence from Lloyds Academy. He lectures on ship management, and in July 2018 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Solent Southampton University in recognition of his contribution to the maritime industry.





# Fighting for national seafarers' jobs

## Indian unions protest over relaxation of cabotage

**Abdulgani Serang, National Union of Seafarers of India (NUSI) general secretary-cum-treasurer, explains why unions are protesting against government moves to open up cabotage**

India is both a seafarer supply and a ship owning country, and Indian seafarers work on both Indian and foreign flag ships.

On Indian flag ships, the shipowners must employ only Indian seafarers, and thousands are gainfully employed under Indian articles of agreement. However, the Ministry of Shipping has recently taken steps which will directly threaten the jobs of all seafarers onboard Indian flag ships.

Until now, only Indian flag ships were allowed to carry domestic cargo. But the government has removed this requirement and has opened our cargo cabotage to foreign flag container ships with foreign crew. This relaxation of rules could be extended to tanker and other vessels.

This means that foreign flag ships will compete with Indian shipowners for coastal trade. If this happens, all seafarers serving under Indian articles of agreement will lose their jobs.

Already, many Indian seafarers have lost their jobs to foreign flag ships, and if Indian shipping companies choose to operate under foreign flags, thousands more jobs will go.

NUSI and the Maritime Union of India (MUI) and their seafarers have strongly protested against this relaxation of cabotage, which is detrimental to the entire Indian shipping fraternity and seafarers in particular. We will do our best to get it revoked. ■

Seafarers are vital for a thriving maritime industry, which drives economic growth and supports a country's independence and security. This is underpinned by cabotage – the system of reserving a nation's domestic maritime trade for its own seafarers – but unfortunately cabotage is increasingly under threat from shipowners chasing profits at the expense of national seafarers' jobs and skills.

Four unions share with *Seafarers' bulletin* their efforts to protect national jobs and local communities and stop the social dumping that undercuts workers' standards



## Chile's unions hope to kill cruise cabotage bill

Seafarers' unions aim to build on their parliamentary success in limiting government proposals to open up cabotage, reports Juan Luis Villalon Jones, ITF inspector, Valparaiso, Chile

Seafarer unions have been clear that we are not against foreign passenger shipping companies doing business in Chile. We simply demand that if they do, they must operate under Chilean legislation. Otherwise we fear it would create a precedent for opening up our cargo cabotage, which we would oppose with every legal means possible.

The government bill to open cabotage for

passenger vessels around Chile's coast unfortunately survived its discussion in the senate, the higher chamber of Parliament.

The good news, however, is that some changes suggested by seafarers' unions were taken into consideration by senators and are now included in the amended proposal which will go to the lower chamber.

The bill aims to apply to all cruise ships with

a capacity of over 400 passengers, and to some with fewer than 400 passengers.

We expect that once it reaches the lower chamber, the ITF and seafarer unions can lobby successfully and prevent the proposal from being approved – because any changes made to it would require further scrutiny by the senate and, judging by previous experiences, this would result in the bill 'sleeping' forever. ■

# Australian cabotage being undermined

Dean Summers, ITF Australia co-ordinator, describes how the nation's cabotage legislation is being undermined and foreign crew exploited

Cabotage exists in Australian legislation under the Coastal Shipping Act. But it is undermined dramatically by provisions which encourage foreign shipping over national flagged and crewed ships. Some foreign ships are on the Australian coast for years.

The Act regulates coastal trade by granting licences to authorised vessels to carry passengers or cargo between ports in Australia. The licensing system allows temporary licences to be issued to agents, operators and charterers. Applications for licences are deeply flawed and maritime

unions are frustrated by the secrecy and manipulations around them.

Currently there are fewer than 10 Australian registered ships, although members of the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) are employed in other areas, such as the offshore industry and on tugs.

A condition under the temporary licensing system is that international seafarers who replace Australian workers must be paid at old industrial award rates, what the government claims is a safety net rate. This is much less

than what Australian seafarers earn but more than the ITF rate.

International crew must also earn a bonus – the difference between their own country's pay and the seafarers' industry award (SIA) rate – for those days that they carry Australian domestic cargo. This cabotage coastal payment applies only on their third and subsequent voyages within one year.

This requirement is not actively policed, and many owners refuse to pay the extra wages until complaints are made by crew members. ■

# US unions face growing threats to cabotage

It has been another year of intense work to promote and protect cabotage laws in the United States, reports David Heindel, secretary-treasurer of the Seafarers International Union of North America



Of great note this year, a heavily financed, anti-cabotage group (the Cato Institute) launched what is expected to be a years-long campaign against the Jones Act, which has protected our national, economic and homeland security for nearly a century.

This is in addition to the usual misguided assaults on the Jones Act from think tanks and individuals who are either enemies of American-flag shipping or who simply don't know the facts.

In spite of these attacks, many ITF unions continue successfully to stand up for the Jones Act, with administration officials, members of Congress and many high-ranking military leaders supporting the American merchant marine. We saw several positive results in 2018,

including pro-maritime legislation introduced in Congress that would back domestic construction of tankers (though they would be used for export cargoes). Also, new tankers, containerships and a combination container/roll-on roll-off ship were launched from US yards or are under construction for the domestic market.

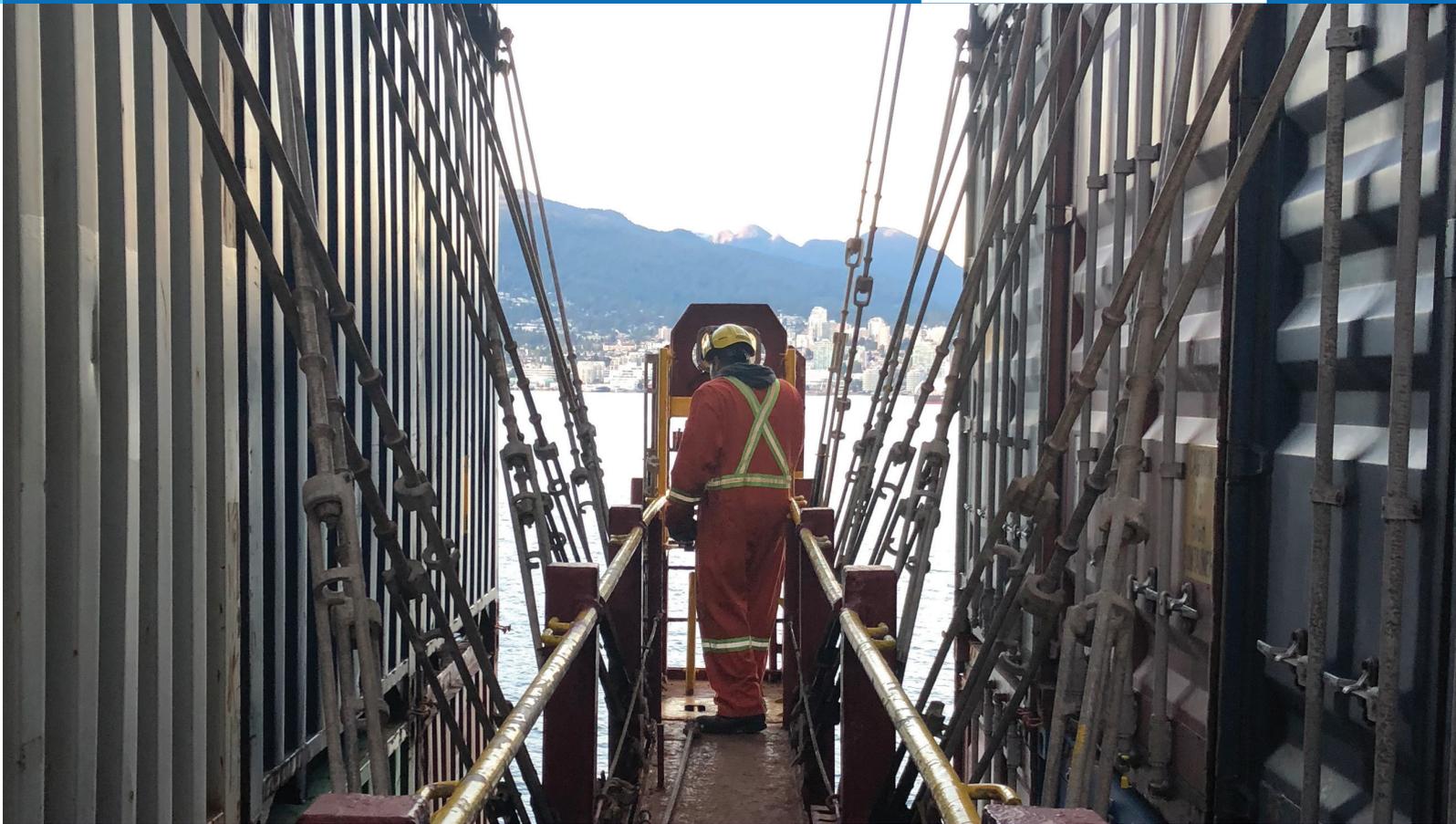
We also received and launched a major study by Seafarers' Rights International, Cabotage Laws of the World.

The American Maritime Partnership (AMP) coalition – which includes ITF unions as members – is also doing outstanding work to stand up for cabotage laws, particularly in the ongoing effort to publicise facts about the benefits the Jones Act provides to the US economy and national security. ■

## Survey reveals global picture of cabotage

A groundbreaking report published in September 2018 revealed the nature and extent of cabotage laws around the world and provided the first independent analysis since 1992. It revealed that 91 countries representing 80 percent of the world's coastal UN maritime states have cabotage laws restricting foreign maritime activity in their domestic coastal trades. The report by Seafarers' Rights International (SRI) was commissioned by the ITF and took more than two years to compile. It will help in developing cabotage policy.

You can download *Cabotage laws of the world* at <http://bit.ly/2RIhhUm>.



## New CBA clause protects seafarers from carrying out lashing

**Seafarers are put in danger when shipowners require them to do lashing work that belongs to dockers. A revised dockers' clause negotiated into the ITF-approved collective bargaining agreement (CBA) has clarified working arrangements, explains Peter Lahay, ITF Canada national co-ordinator**

In most ports, dockers claim lashing work as their jurisdiction. But some shipowners push seafarers to do lashing work on top of their regular duties. Maritime insurance companies and port state agencies are increasingly concerned about crew lashing and unlashings while under way.

In all this, the ITF position is clear: lashing is dockers' work.

The economic pressure of tight time lines and slots means crews are often required to drop the lashing at sea in stormy conditions so the vessel can be handled immediately on arrival. This is not safe for seafarers.

Containers that are not properly secured sway with sea conditions and wind. This can cause something known as 'stack collapse', where weakened container corners break down and cause the entire stack to collapse.

Many flag states allow for unrealistic manning levels on ships, meaning small crew complements are often tired while standing watch on the bridge or in the engine room. The crew's primary function is the safe navigation and maintenance of the ship. Fatigue already leads to collisions and groundings, and to crushed arms, pinched limbs and fatal falls. The job of lashing should not be added to crew who are already overworked.

To clarify the position that lashing is dockers' work, the revised clause in the ITF CBA says:

"To ensure that neither seafarers nor anyone else on board whether in permanent or temporary employment by the Company shall carry out cargo handling services in a port, at a terminal or on board a vessel, where dock workers, who are members of an ITF-affiliated union, are providing the cargo handling services. Where there are not sufficient

numbers of qualified dock workers available, the ship's crew may carry out the work provided that there is prior agreement of the ITF Dockers Union or ITF Unions concerned; and provided that the individual seafarers volunteer to carry out such duties; and those seafarers are qualified and adequately compensated for that work. For the purpose of this clause 'cargo handling services' may include but is not limited to: loading, unloading, lashing, unlashings, checking and receiving."

For decades, dockers have fought to improve conditions for seafarers. Now it's time to work together to recognise that seafarers should not do dockers' work. Solidarity means we keep one another safe.

**If you have concerns about your safety, please contact an ITF Inspector or contact us at by email at [dockers@itf.org.uk](mailto:dockers@itf.org.uk).** ■



# ITF takes Irish government to court

**ITF senior legal assistant Jonny Warring gives an update on the ongoing legal fight for the rights of migrant fishers in Ireland**

The ITF is continuing its fight for the rights of migrant fishers in Ireland by taking the Irish state to court.

After discovering several cases of suspected abuse and potential human trafficking in the Irish fishing industry, the ITF reached the conclusion that the current scheme used to issue migrant fishers with permits allowing them to work in Ireland was facilitating the problem and that various state bodies were failing in their obligation to police the scheme.

Ken Fleming, ITF co-ordinator for the UK and Ireland, has been collecting evidence of abuses in the fishing industry for 10 years and his work has led to the identification of more than 15 potential victims of human trafficking.

In May 2018, the ITF sent formal notice to the Minister for Justice and Equality indicating the intention to launch court proceedings. The minister failed to respond in a substantive manner and the ITF decided to proceed with legal action. After a number of delays, the case

was scheduled for a hearing in late November. At the hearing, the ITF is hoping to obtain a temporary injunction preventing the operation of the permit scheme.

The end goal of the action is to have the scheme permanently suspended and to highlight the inaction of the Irish state in relation to the numerous cases of suspected human rights breaches in the Irish fishing industry. ■



## First union offers Thai fishers hope

Johnny Hansen, ITF fisheries section chair, hails the launch of the first union representing fishers in Thailand, who suffer some of the worst abuses in the global industry

The pervasive use of trafficked, slave, forced and bonded labour in the Thai fishing industry, together with dangerous working conditions, long hours, and a lack of legal protections for fishers, has been well publicised and the source of international condemnation in recent years.

The Thai government has reacted to global scrutiny by overhauling the industry's monitoring and inspection frameworks and strengthening national law, including increasing the penalties for infringing fishers' rights. But the majority of fishers in Thailand are still vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

The ITF has been resolute that without enforceable rights at the workplace and the strength that comes from being represented by a union, labour rights violations and the mistreatment of fishers will continue.

Following 12 months of organising at ports across Thailand, in May 2018 the ITF officially launched the Fishers' Rights Network (FRN), an independent, democratic fishers' union which will campaign to improve the wages, working conditions and labour rights of all fishers in the Thai fishing industry.

The network received widespread endorsement across the global trade union movement, from union federations, national union centres and maritime unions, and from unions in Thailand.

The launch in Songkhla, Thailand was attended by union leaders from KPI in Indonesia, IFOMS in Myanmar and the Cambodian Labor Congress; non-profit organisations including the International Labour Organization (ILO), ACTRAV, the Solidarity Centre, Human Rights

Watch and Stella Maris; and Thailand's largest seafood processor, Thai Union.

The establishment of the FRN is a huge step forward for fishers' rights in the fishing industry in Thailand, and regionally in Asia.

Rights are not given, they are taken, and when it comes to defending and improving working conditions for fishers, the best way forward is fishers representing themselves, organising and advocating for themselves.

The FRN will continue to train hundreds of fishers in first aid and injury procedures, pressure the Thai government to ratify Convention 188 on Work in Fishing, and work with Thai Union on the rollout of their Vessel Code of Conduct. ■

**“Until now, there has not been a democratic union in the Thai fishing industry. The presence of organised fishers at the table participating in social dialogue and negotiating agreements is going to be a big deal. Getting fishers to the table to talk about what they want and argue about how to make it happen, that’s really important, and until the FRN union was founded, Thai fishing hasn’t had a formal player like that.”**

Jason Judd, senior technical officer and programme manager, Combatting unacceptable forms of work in the Thai fishing and seafood industry, ILO country office for Thailand, Cambodia, and Lao People’s Democratic Republic’

**Follow the progress of the Fishers’ Rights Network at  
[www.justiceforfishers.org](http://www.justiceforfishers.org)**

# New ITF Seafarers' Trust head ambitious to support seafarers better



**You started in your new role in July 2018. Tell us about your background and what took you to the Trust**

Long ago I studied Russian and French, worked in publishing then did a master's degree in politics and economics before I joined the ITF's seafarers' section in 2005. I was interested in the difficulties of migrant workers and indirectly that led me to maritime, which was also close to home as my father was a seafarer back in the 50s and 60s. It was amazing to get a job with the ITF but also sad because my father had recently died so I

**Seafarers' bulletin meets Katie Higginbottom, the new head of the ITF Seafarers' Trust, and hears about her plans to work in new ways to better support seafarer welfare**

missed out on talking about it with him.

Working at sea means being outside normal jurisdictions and protections, which is fine if you have a responsible employer. Seafarers need to be respected and empowered to confront the all-too-frequent cases of poor treatment and exploitation that require the ITF's intervention. Being head of the Trust gives me the perfect opportunity to have a greater impact on the lives of seafarers.

**What changes do you want to make in the way the Trust works?**

The Trust aims to be the leader in promoting and improving the wellbeing of seafarers worldwide. We're looking at maritime trends and geographic shifts to ensure that we maximise our influence and complement the work of the ITF. Areas of interest include China, West Africa, the Middle East and South America, where we think there's more we

could do to develop partnerships and projects to further our aims.

We'd like to expand our work with ITF member unions – particularly those from labour supply countries and port states with limited infrastructure – through programmes that advance the wellbeing of seafarers and their families. An important element of this will be developing stronger relationships with influential industry players such as shipowners, P&I clubs and global network terminal operators.

We also want to support new and young union leaders with their welfare initiatives, and we'll continue to fund scholarships to the World Maritime University and International Maritime Law Institute.

**What will this look like in practice?**

We're concentrating on work in three priority

areas: seafarers' access to communication, occupational health and wellbeing, and support for seafarers' families.

Internet access remains a primary concern for seafarers and as digital technology expands, this becomes a 'digital rights' issue. The Trust will commission research, continue to fund projects that facilitate access to wi-fi in ports, and promote best practice throughout the industry.

The nature of the seafarers' work environment – long periods away from home, in a confined environment, lengthy contracts and fatigue-inducing shift patterns – can exacerbate psychological stress. The Trust wants to contribute to a better understanding of the risk factors and more support for seafarers and their families.

The long absences from home can affect seafarers' family dynamics, too. The Trust intends to broaden its support of union-

led initiatives to offer enhanced services to seafarers' families, such as access to counselling, financial advice, coaching for children and education on financial management.

One example of this is the Filika (Lifeboat) project in Turkey, an initiative of the Turkish Seafarers' Union and the psychology department of Istanbul Sabahattin Zeim University. Initial research showed a key issue to be the strains on family life placed by a frequently absent father. The project has a practical component in working with social workers to support seafarers' wives and children in need.

**What have been the highlights of your first few months in the job?**

It has been very motivating and rewarding to meet seafarers, unions and welfare organisations around the world to discuss how the Trust can have most impact.

My first visit was to the port of Algiers in July to discuss with the unions and port authorities there how the Trust could support the provision of welfare facilities. Seafarers are not able to go ashore in Algeria because of security concerns so it is particularly important to find a way to provide services inside the port.

At the North American Maritime Ministries Association (NAMMA) conference in Baltimore in August 2018 it was impressive to see the dedication of voluntary workers who give enormous amounts of time and energy to making foreign seafarers feel welcome in what would otherwise be quite soulless, even hostile ports. The Trust supports many of these organisations by giving grants for vehicles for ship visitors and the maintenance of centres and equipment. While there we visited two local seafarers' centres and presented Rev Mary Davisson, director and chaplain of the Baltimore International Seafarers' Center, with a Trust sticker for the minibus we recently funded. ■



Filika project participants



## Portable communication pods



ITF Congress delegates try out new pod

Surveys conducted by the Trust and other maritime funding and welfare organisations reveal that access to a reliable internet connection is a key concern for seafarers.

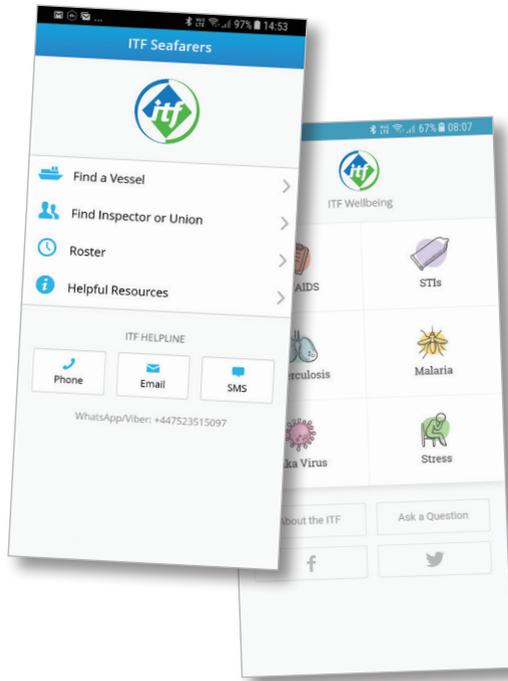
In response, the Trust has had five 20ft container boxes converted into portable communication 'pods' to provide seafarers with access to wi-fi, tablet consoles and a space to relax. Powered by solar panels, they are energy efficient and viable in areas which lack existing infrastructure.

At the time of writing, the first two pods are destined for Jakarta, Indonesia and Tin Can Island, Nigeria and the rest should soon be in Senegal, Colombia and Brazil.

**The Seafarers' Trust is the charitable arm of the ITF – find out more at [www.seafarerstrust.org](http://www.seafarerstrust.org)**



# Free ITF apps: ITF Seafarers and ITF Wellbeing



## ITF Seafarers

- Find out about your ship
- Learn what a union can do for you
- Discover where to get help in a crisis
- Get in touch with the ITF
- Find an ITF inspector or ITF maritime union

## ITF Wellbeing

Worried about HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), tuberculosis (TB), malaria, the Zika virus or stress?

### Find all the latest information and advice:

- Symptoms
- Transmission
- Treatment
- Prevention
- Common misconceptions about the disease

They're free and available for both *Android* and *iOS* devices just download them from your *app store* or from [www.itfseafarers.org/seafarer-apps.cfm](http://www.itfseafarers.org/seafarer-apps.cfm)



Other ways to keep up to date about life at sea:

- Follow and have your say on the latest news using *#itfseafarers* on *Twitter*
- Keep up with the ITF and union news *@ITFglobalunion* on *Twitter* and at [www.facebook.com/ITFseafarerssupport](http://www.facebook.com/ITFseafarerssupport)

## Lashing in Ports is Dockers' Work

Are you being asked to carry out lashing and securing of containers on ships in ports?

If you are being asked to do lashing and unlashings in ports without written permission from the local dockers' union, then your company may be in breach of an ITF collective agreement. Let us know if this happens to you by sending us an email detailing what happened, the vessel name and location to: [Reclaimlashing@itf.org.uk](mailto:Reclaimlashing@itf.org.uk)

*We will keep your details confidential to the ITF and won't tell your employer.*

**Protect your safety and support your brothers and sisters on the docks by refusing to do lashing and unlashings work in ports on vessels covered by ITF agreements.**