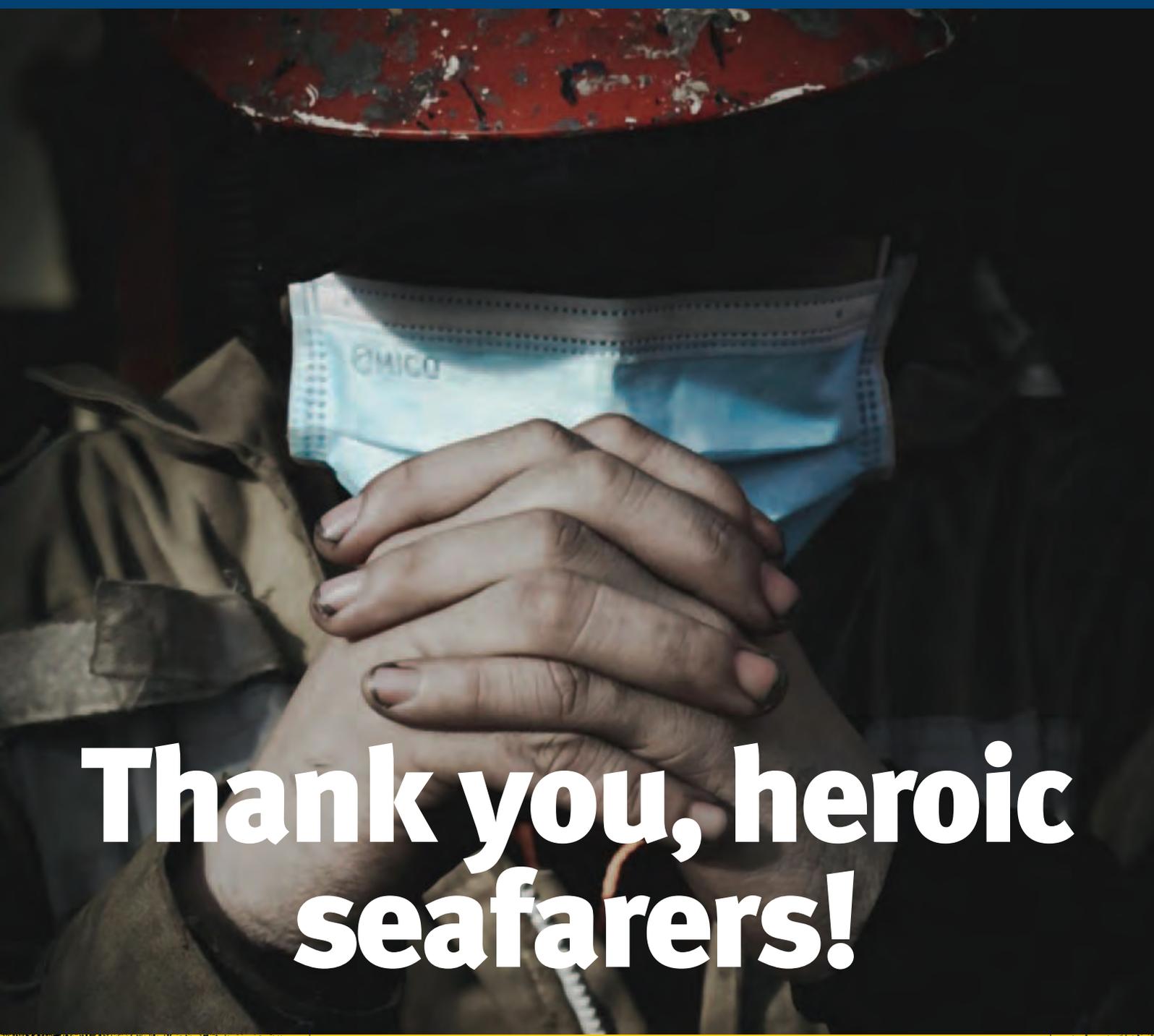




Seafarers' Bulletin

English | no.35/2021

International Transport Workers' Federation



Thank you, heroic seafarers!

In this issue:

Impact of Coronavirus and crew change crisis

Scammers using social media

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 more than 18 million transport workers from nearly 670 affiliates in 150 countries, including more than 910,000 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 132 inspectors and contacts working in ports worldwide.

ITF SEAFARERS' BULLETIN no.35/2021

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Web: www.itfseafarers.org | **Email:** seafsupport@itf.org.uk | **Tel:** +44 (20) 7403 2733 | **Fax:** +44 (20) 7357 7871

Cover photo: Ama Namin

Welcome



Firstly, I want to say a huge thank you on behalf of the ITF to all seafarers, and every one of our maritime affiliates, for your professionalism and diligence in carrying out your duties in spite of the fear and uncertainty created by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Around the world, millions of seafarers remained committed to moving goods that fed our families and ensured appropriate health care. Without your sacrifices – and those of your families – global trade would have come to a standstill, with far more severe consequences. Despite all the difficulties, our affiliates stepped up to the challenge and continued providing much-needed support to their members.

At the ITF, the pandemic dominated our work in 2020 and we fought harder than ever for seafarers' rights and recovered millions in unpaid wages.

At the global level, the ITF has worked tirelessly with a wide range of partners to bring higher awareness to the crew change crisis which saw many of you – 400,000 at its peak – unable to return home or even leave your ship for months on end, often without access to medical care or shore leave.

Our strategic engagement with social partners and the maritime industry, particularly with the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and the International Maritime Employers' Council (IMEC), has gathered support across the world to end what the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, has acknowledged is a 'humanitarian crisis'. With the support of the International Maritime Organization and the International Labour Organization, we campaigned for countries to designate you as 'key workers' and facilitate crew change as a matter of urgency. We continue to search for solutions and to ensure that your rights are protected along the way.

In this edition of the *Seafarers' bulletin*, we report on these national and global efforts by the ITF and its family of unions, and examine how the virus has affected the global maritime industry.

With growing evidence of the high toll the pandemic has taken on seafarers' health and wellbeing, this edition highlights what support the ITF continues to offer you. And we also report on how the ITF Seafarers' Trust Covid-19 Emergency Fund helped bring relief to many seafarers and their families.

With the scourge of abandonment at sea continuing to rise, our inspectors and contacts have been there to assist, as you can see in some of the harrowing stories featured in this edition.

You will also see that recruitment scammers are getting smarter and the number of fraudulent jobs offered via social media has increased considerably. We offer guidance to help you protect yourselves from falling victim to these scams.

As usual, our eight-page pullout is packed with information and advice and provides you with contact details for all ITF inspectors.

With best wishes for a more prosperous and healthy 2021,

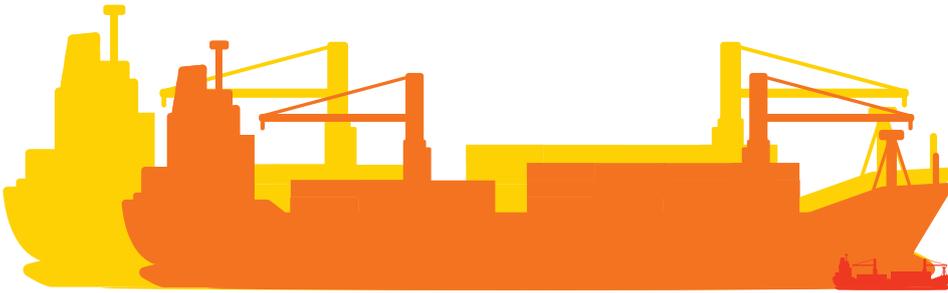
Stephen Cotton
ITF general secretary

The ITF FOC campaign in numbers

As at 1 December 2020:

ITF inspections

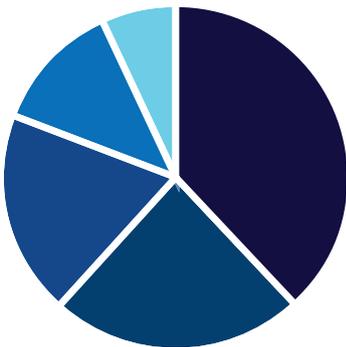
Total number of vessels inspected broken down into number without problems and number with problems.



Total backpay recovered



Top five problems by type found during ITF inspections



Vessels and seafarers covered by ITF agreements

315,532
Total number of seafarers covered

13,378
Total number of agreements



Government inaction created unprecedented crew change crisis

The lives of seafarers operating cruise ships, cargo vessels and fishing vessels were thrown into crisis when governments failed to enact practical measures to enable crew change during the Coronavirus pandemic. *Seafarers' bulletin* reports on the ITF response and lessons the industry should learn



Heroic seafarers victims of crew change crisis

In January 2021 – 10 months on from the start of the pandemic – hundreds of thousands of crew members remained stranded on board their ships. Dave Heindel, chair of the ITF seafarers' section, reports on how the ITF maritime family swung into action to support seafarers and fight for government action to end the crew change crisis

When the pandemic struck in March 2020, seafarers at the end of their contracts were suddenly prevented from going home. Flights were cancelled and borders were closed by port states, transit countries and seafarers' home nations. As the months stretched on, seafarers' dismay turned into bewilderment then anger as governments proved unwilling to find practical solutions to their plight.

Every month around 100,000 seafarers need to be changed over from ships as the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) specifies an 11-month maximum a seafarer can be on board. Once their contract is finished, a seafarer has the right to stop working and be returned home at the employer's expense. But exercising that right became extremely difficult during the Covid-19 pandemic.

On 19 March the ITF reluctantly agreed to crew contract extensions, where seafarers consented, because of the pandemic. Throughout April and May, as seafarers selflessly helped to keep critical global supplies flowing, the ITF, its unions and maritime employers worked together as never before to educate governments on the best way to enable crew change. They urged governments to label seafarers as key workers, exempting them from travel and transit restrictions so they could go home.

Their 12-step solution to crew change was adopted on 6 May by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). On 28 May, the IMO, International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) urged governments to act. On 12 June, the United Nations (UN) backed our key worker call.

But still the crisis worsened. Some of the stranded seafarers had been on board for more than a year. Some governments wouldn't allow them ashore for a walk or

even emergency medical care. Seafarers told us they were growing increasingly tired, fatigued and desperate to leave their 'floating prisons'. Their health, wellbeing and safety was increasingly at risk. The situation was intolerable.

The power of charterers came sharply into focus. Charterers find and book ships on behalf of cargo owners, which gives them a big say over the route and diversions ships take. During the pandemic, many charterers began inserting 'no crew change' clauses into their contracts with shipowners. This means that, while a charterer has a booking active on a ship, the ship's owner and manning agent are prevented from diverting to a nearby port that allows crew change, no matter how long crew have been on board.

Enough is enough

Three months into the pandemic, the ITF announced 'enough is enough': that, from 16 June, the ITF and its affiliated seafarers' unions would do everything they could to assist over-contract seafarers to exercise the right to stop working and return home. We produced guidance for seafarers on these and their MLC rights.

ITF general secretary Steve Cotton declared, "If getting seafarers off these ships causes chaos in supply chains, if ports back up from Singapore to San Francisco, and if this causes ship insurance providers to pull their coverage and global trade to grind to a halt, then that is on the heads of politicians, not the world's seafarers."

He added that national governments could avoid this by simply making a few, small, practical exceptions to coronavirus restrictions and allow the key workers to transit through their territories and get home, to be relieved by a fresh crew.

Singapore had facilitated crew changes from March onwards and showed the way to do it. It insisted that all crews isolate for two weeks, be tested at an approved centre before arrival in Singapore and isolate in floating accommodation for up to 72 hours before boarding their vessel.

Unions and industry helped to develop a consistent standard for infection controls to encourage ports to open up. The ITF and International Maritime Employers' Council (IMEC) set up a pilot programme in Manila, Philippines, providing rooms for seafarers for two weeks, with properly audited PCR Covid tests at the beginning and end, before they flew out to ports. By the end of January 2021, it had accommodated 1,389 seafarers and 214 were currently occupying the rooms. Of the 1,389, 61 tested positive.

By the end of August, the IMO reported that around 50 nations were implementing the crew change protocols. The ITF and IMEC jointly contributed USD500,000 to a fund set up by unions and maritime organisations in Singapore to support seafarer supply countries carry out safe crew change. The fund has established a CrewSafe audit programme based on Singapore's model, to enable safe and scalable 'corridors' for crew change.

International pressure grows

A shocking 60 percent of seafarers surveyed by the ITF in September believed they or crew mates were more likely than not to be 'involved in an accident that could harm human life, property or the marine environment due to tiredness or fatigue'.

Following submissions by the ITF and the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), a landmark ruling by the UN's ILO Committee of Experts in December 2020 found that governments had failed abjectly in their duty of

care towards seafarers under international law during the pandemic.

In a joint response, ITF general secretary Steve Cotton and ICS secretary general Guy Platten said, "This ruling...makes clear that all governments have to follow international law and urgently recognise seafarers as key workers with practical effect. This means allowing seafarers to get off in ports for medical attention...enabling seafarers to get

to an airport to fly home when their contracts are finished and...letting replacement crews through a country's border to join those waiting ships without having to battle a mountain of bureaucracy."

On 26 January, 2021, a new global pledge signed by over 300 maritime industry and human rights leaders put accountability on the industry to use their leverage to end the crew change crisis. Signatories to the Neptune

Declaration on Seafarer Wellbeing and Crew Change included major multinationals BP, Cargill, Rio Tinto and Shell.

Only 46 countries have classified seafarers as key workers, and only a few of them actually apply it without creating other barriers preventing seafarer crew exchange. The ITF hopes the intensifying international pressure will bring an end to the humanitarian crisis. ■

HIS FAMILY ARE VERY GRATEFUL AND APPRECIATED THE EFFORTS OF THE ITF.



Seafarer driven to brink of despair

ITF inspector Hamid Rachik and his colleagues in the Morocco Workers' Union (UMT) came to the rescue of a desperately ill seafarer

Jowanie Zapanta is a 27-year-old Filipino seafarer, who has served at sea for seven years. In March 2020 he had already served 11 months as 3rd officer aboard the Leni Selmer and was desperate to leave. But when the Covid-19 pandemic struck Morocco immediately prohibited crew changes to stop the spread of the virus. Forced to remain on board in the port of Casablanca, Morocco, he struggled on for two months before it all became too much for him. Jowanie Zapanta attempted suicide on 28 May.

We struggled to obtain local authorisation to allow the seafarer to disembark immediately so that he could go to hospital. It took two port security commissions before the ship was able to dock temporarily on 30 May and the seafarer was immediately admitted to hospital.

Jowanie Zapanta remained in hospital for two months, receiving intensive treatment. During this time, Rachik and a union comrade visited him regularly and he was able to talk to his family back home. He was flown home on 2 August, accompanied by a doctor from the hospital. His family are very grateful and appreciated the efforts of the ITF. ■



US bureaucracy prevents crew change

UK inspector Tommy Molloy assisted Marlow Navigation to get crew change on several of its vessels, including the Yasa Golden Dardanelles

The vessel was in Houston, USA. The crew had been on board for over 12 months and the crew relievers were already on board. But the US visas of two Filipino crew members had expired and the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) refused to allow them to disembark, even with an armed guard to accompany them to the airport.

When Marlow got in touch, Molloy immediately contacted inspector Shwe Tun Aung in Houston, who approached the CBP. He explained that there were 24 people on board with safety equipment for only 22 and that the two seafarers with expired contracts would effectively be kept prisoner by bureaucracy as the vessel was scheduled to operate along the USA's Gulf coast for the foreseeable future. The CBP remained unmoved.

The company had no choice but to send the two relievers home again, depriving them of the wages they had expected to earn, and to keep on board the two seafarers who had hoped to be finally going home. ■

... AND BY THE START OF NOVEMBER SHE WAS SAFELY AND HAPPILY HOME ...



Seafarers stop working in repatriation bid

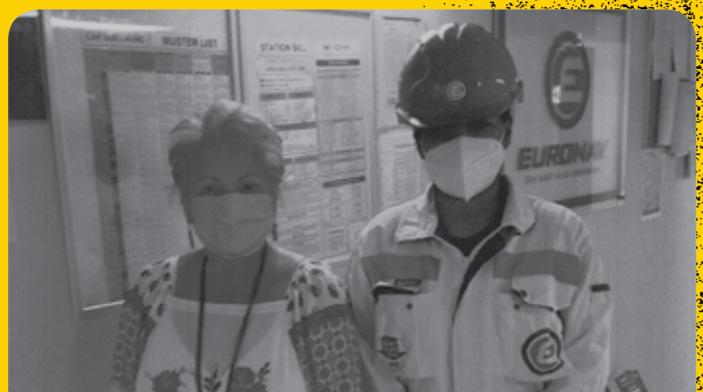
The Burmese crew of the Unison Jasper contacted ITF inspector Matt Purcell in Geelong port, Australia in June 2020, wanting repatriation after more than 12 months aboard

The crew had signed extensions but when the master made up the new contracts he put the real wages in the SEA, which indicated double bookkeeping.

We worked closely with Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) to have the vessel detained in Geelong and Brisbane for several crew repatriations and the recovery of back wage payments totalling around USD80,000.

Throughout the discussions with Purcell, the Taiwanese owner claimed that the vessel had no agreement. This was found to be false when inspector Dean Summers took up the case in Newcastle, following crew allegations that they were abused, intimidated and forced to sign contract extensions which would have kept them on board for up to 14 months. The ITF and Maritime Union of Australia informed AMSA and the vessel was detained in Newcastle. Another USD60,000 in owed wages was recovered by ITF inspectors there.

The 11 crew members left the ship in July and unions constructed a wind break around them on the dock, as pandemic restrictions kept them within 13 metres of the vessel. They were transferred to Sydney, where they waited several hours while police coordinated exemptions so they could be transferred to a hotel for two weeks' quarantine. They eventually flew home in August. In September, AMSA banned the Unison Jasper from entering Australia for six months. ■



Stuck without sanitary products

ITF inspector Shwe Tun Aung in Houston recalls being contacted by a distressed young Panamanian cadet on 1 October begging for help to be repatriated

The apprentice engineer on a tanker performing lightering along the United States coast had been on board since 20 February, even though her lightering parole had expired. She wrote: "I am in very difficult situation with my period and I do not have any period pads to hold the bleeding. I feel very humiliated and I fear for my mental health."

The company had tried repeatedly to persuade the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to let the cadet disembark, including requesting the assistance of the Panama Maritime Authority. On 1 October, it was advised by the CBP to 'cancel [the] seaman's flight arrangements considering that the Consulate of Panama is involved ... and it will take about one to two weeks until we will receive a decision from Houston CBP'. Aung's pleas to the CBP went unanswered.

In the meantime, the cadet received support and sanitary supplies from seafarers' centres and the ITF's crew change task force in Texas. Then the company eventually transferred the seafarer to another vessel so that she could sign off in the next port, and by the start of November she was safely and happily home in Panama. ■

Floating palaces become prisons for crew

Some of the earliest headlines were about the spread of Covid-19 on cruise ships, when fearful and ill passengers and crew were refused permission to dock or quarantined in port. ITF cruise ship task force chair Johan Øyen reports on how the ITF and its unions responded

OVER 80 PERCENT OF CRUISE SHIPS ARE COVERED BY AN ITF AGREEMENT, SO WE SWUNG INTO ACTION WITH OUR AFFILIATED SEAFARERS' UNIONS AND OTHER MARITIME ORGANISATIONS TO GET THE CREWS REPATRIATED. BUT WE FACED HUGE OBSTACLES.

Governments worked to disembark passengers as quickly as possible but crews were often neglected.

By mid-April, around 314 out of 385 cruise ships owned and operated by the major cruise lines were laid up, many with hundreds of seafarers on board.

Over 80 percent of cruise ships are covered by an ITF agreement, so we swung into action with our affiliated seafarers' unions and other maritime organisations to get the crews repatriated. But we faced huge obstacles.

Many countries did not live up to their obligations under the Maritime Labour Convention and prohibited seafarers to enter or transit through their territories, despite guarantees from cruise lines that they would charter flights to get the seafarers home. Ports applied additional restrictions to cruise ship crew. Some countries did not even allow their own citizens to enter or slowed down the process in ways that hurt their seafarers.

In several cases, crew members were stranded at airports for days because their papers were not in order or they did not have the necessary visas. Some were disembarked in other countries, where they were stuck for months before finally being repatriated.

Tragic toll on lives

The stress and uncertainty of being trapped on board inevitably took its toll on seafarers' mental health.

Four crew members reportedly ended their lives within a period of two weeks. On 30 April, a crew member from Poland jumped overboard from the Jewel of the Seas. On 9 May, a seafarer from Hungary was found dead in his cabin on board the Carnival Breeze. A Chinese seafarer aboard the Mariner of the Seas died on 10 May, while the vessel was anchored at sea in the Bahamas. And a Ukrainian seafarer working on board the Regal

Princess jumped overboard in Rotterdam when she heard that her flight home had been cancelled.

The ITF urged governments and flag states to redouble their efforts to facilitate crew change. Dave Heindel, chair of the ITF's seafarers' section, argued that, "Seafarers are being penalised by the strict restrictions... to contain the spread of the virus despite no justification or scientific proof that seafarers on cruise vessels pose any greater risk than other categories of workers or members of the public".

A major humanitarian success

By August, around 200,000 seafarers from cruise ships had been repatriated. We commend the cruise lines and those governments which worked with us to achieve this major humanitarian success. It required tremendous logistical coordination, particularly in the face of other governments, including flag and port states, failing to live up to their legal and human rights obligations under international law.

Looking ahead

As cruises slowly start up again, the ITF and its affiliated maritime unions continue to be concerned about the risks to seafarers and passengers.

We are working with governments and cruise operators to ensure that adequate health and safety measures are in place and are followed, and that cruise location countries commit to allow seafarers shore leave and to go ashore for medical assistance and crew change as required.

We're looking forward to working with the industry to ensure that recovery plans and the restart of operations coincide with an open conversation on how to improve the working and living conditions of seafarers on board cruise ships. ■



Over 3,000 crew quarantined on Mein Schiff 3

ITF inspector Hamani Amadou recounts the effort it took to repatriate thousands of crew from one cruise ship

After passengers disembarked the Mein Schiff 3 on 23 March, the company transferred 3,000 seafarers from six of its other ships onto the vessel. It sailed to Germany in order to commence repatriations, docking in Cuxhaven on 28 April. But the detection of a Covid-19 outbreak two days later led the company to quarantine everyone on board.

After weeks of intense discussions with the company, Maya Schwiegershausen-Gueth from ITF affiliate ver.di in Germany and I were able to assist the repatriation of approximately 1,200 of the seafarers on 8 May. Most of the rest of the multi-national crew who tested negative were repatriated in the following weeks, apart from 192 Indian seafarers who remained on board without any prospective travel date and limited support from their government. They eventually made it home in late June.

Schwiegershausen-Gueth criticised the lack of responsibility shown by the company and flag state Malta and said that without the support shown by the German government and seafarers' mission, the situation on board could have quickly escalated. ■

WE ARE WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS AND CRUISE OPERATORS TO ENSURE THAT ADEQUATE HEALTH AND SAFETY MEASURES ARE IN PLACE AND ARE FOLLOWED, AND THAT CRUISE LOCATION COUNTRIES COMMIT TO ALLOW SEAFARERS SHORE LEAVE AND TO GO ASHORE FOR MEDICAL ASSISTANCE AND CREW CHANGE AS REQUIRED.



Humanitarian corridor in Uruguay for stricken cruise crew

The Uruguayan government authorised a humanitarian corridor to help a crew infected by Covid-19 disembark, thanks to the Unión de Trabajadores del Transporte Marítimo, Aéreo, Terrestre y Afines (UTT) says Edgar Díaz, ITF Latin America regional secretary

On 15 March, the Bahamas-flagged Greg Mortimer left Ushuaia, Argentina. A week later, the first symptoms appeared among the passengers. They were refused disembarkation in Argentina and Chile because the governments had closed their ports and borders. The Uruguayan government authorised the vessel to dock in Montevideo on 27 March and an operation was carried out to repatriate the passengers.

The 83-strong crew, however, was forced to remain on board despite the spread of the virus and 39 seafarers tested positive. A Filipino seafarer died. The ship spent two months at sea with the infected crew confined in their cabins without appropriate sanitary conditions.

On 20 April, UTT general secretary Francisco del Gaudio contacted the crew to offer union and ITF support. He was told that internet connectivity on board was interrupted to prevent information on the severity of the situation being leaked, including attempted suicides by crew members and confirmation that two seafarers in charge of food distribution had tested positive. The union, which held the ship's ITF agreement, repeatedly asked the company for information but received only silence.

In response to UTT pressure, the Uruguayan government announced on 8 May that all crew members would be allowed to disembark, be quarantined, given appropriate medical care and then be repatriated. ■

Learning from the pandemic to make maritime better for seafarers

ITF maritime coordinator Jacqueline Smith shares her reflections on the response to the crew change crisis by unions, industry and governments and highlights lessons for the future



How well did the industry respond?

The ITF and industry had a clear joint interest to prevent seafarers becoming fatigued, which would jeopardise their safety and environment, and to keep global trade moving safely and efficiently. On the whole, there's been very good, open communication and close cooperation between us.

Less positively, I'd say that classification societies – who carry out inspections on behalf of flag states – have not been very active and seem a bit lost in the response. They boast about their remote inspections but these put extra work on an already exhausted crew, particularly when manning levels are at the bare minimum to be safe since it has been challenging to get relief crew on board. I'm also surprised that many P&I clubs haven't shown more concern to ensure that crew and ships are not at risk. What is clear is that the FoC system has failed to protect the seafarers in this crisis, with no-one taking responsibility; at times trying to get things done has been like passing a hot potato.

And how about governments?

Some governments have been very supportive but so far only 46 have given seafarers key worker status.

Some transport ministers understood the situation but maritime is not widely understood by their government colleagues. That's why we want to extend to other countries the joint ITF and International Maritime Employers' Council safe quarantine pilot project in the Philippines. It demonstrates well the need to engage not only with transport ministries but with education, health, customs and immigration ministries, too, so that they better understand crew change and their role in making it happen safely.

There are states still not cooperating at all. Each government controls its own borders and we can't force them to act. I believed that vessels should not go to countries where governments refused to allow crew changes but others argued that this would badly affect the most vulnerable nations.

We don't understand why governments treat seafarers so differently from other workers who can go across or between borders, such as civil aviation workers.

Could the ITF and its unions have responded differently?

With hindsight, we should have engaged early on with groups we normally have less to do with, such as business and human rights organisations, to expand our potential allies. We could have been quicker to be more active with networks which relate to or depend on maritime. And we should have put pressure on charterers early on, to dissuade them from inserting non-crew change clauses in their party arrangements.

What are the implications for the ITF and the maritime industry?

We should take a more holistic approach and not just work with our traditional social partners, which would also help our affiliates to leak into other groups in their countries that could assist. We need to set up an emergency group with our social partners to quickly

develop action plans and avoid duplication of work. And we need to look at the failure of the FoC system and push for a transparent tree chain that can be followed.

How will the crew change crisis play out?

Thankfully, the percentage of crew needing change has dropped but we need to keep putting pressure on recalcitrant governments to get the rest home.

Vaccinations are now key. We believe seafarers need to come high up the list but we're cautious about how vaccination programmes will be rolled out and what governments will require. How many vaccinations, how long a gap between them? Will they accept a health certification from another country? And given how many seafarers come from developing countries, how will they be prioritised?

What are the ITF's maritime priorities over the coming year?

The retention and recruitment of women and young seafarers is vital. We will need to work together with the industry to ensure they get proper skills and training to equip them for jobs on board.

And we're determined to prevent temporary shortcuts made to safety and seafarers' rights during the pandemic – such as remote inspections – becoming permanent practices.

Your message to seafarers?

Thank you. Keep standing up for your rights. If you don't voice opposition, it's difficult for us to do anything. Come to us. We'll back you. ■

Hsin Chien Marine **agent** **and owner** **rob crew**

The ITF in Australia, Myanmar and the US have been assisting the Myanmar and Chinese crew of several ships owned or operated by Hsin Chien Marine in Taiwan to recover several hundred thousand dollars in owed wages. But their efforts have been made even more difficult by the manning agent, claims Matt Purcell, ITF assistant coordinator in Australia



Hsin Chien Marine (HCM) has persistently practiced double bookkeeping on its vessels in order to avoid paying seafarers fully for their work. My team has had several experiences with its 'New'-named vessels – which are covered by an ITF agreement with the National Chinese Seamen's Union (NCSU) – so were not surprised when we were asked to assist the crew on the Panama-flagged New Legacy in early 2020. We recovered the wages owed and witnessed them being paid.

As news of this spread, Myanmar crew on other HCM ships voiced concerns about current and past double bookkeeping. This led to ITF actions against HCM vessels in several countries, including the New Champ in Newcastle, Australia and the New Aspiration in Busan, South Korea. As a result, HCM agreed to pay these outstanding wages, witnessed by officials of ITF-affiliated IFOMS in Yangon, Myanmar.

Shortly afterwards, HCM dumped all its Myanmar crew off four vessels in Taiwan, claiming reasons of Covid-19. Four seafarers from the New Champ courageously refused to leave Taiwan until they each received the two months' basic wages for contract termination they were entitled to under the ITF/NCSU agreement. Their solidarity helped to escalate the battle and will contribute to winning the protection of all Burmese seafarers being mistreated by shipowners.

We recovered around USD190,000 in unpaid wages. However, HCM still owes around USD380,000 in outstanding claims made by ITF inspectors in Australia and America, with assistance from Canadian inspectors.

We were appalled to discover that throughout this whole process, the manning agent – Sunrise Marine Enterprises Ltd in Yangon – had:

- Terrorised the crew into returning settlement payments, so it had fraudulent receipts to support its false claims that payment had been made

Hsin Chien **Marine agent and owner rob crew** *continued* >

- Forced the crew's family members to open bank accounts and then pass all the cheques they had pre-signed back to Sunrise so it could control and access crew salaries
- Issued employment contracts which differed from the contracts issued on vessels by HCM
- Forced crew members to sign letters for the owed wages due to them to be paid into a joint bank account with Sunrise, so the agent could pay the crew what they wanted

In a letter to the Department of Maritime Administration in Yangon on 26 November 2020, ITF inspectorate coordinator Steve Trowsdale wrote: 'All of these actions are totally unacceptable and in breach of the ITF TCC agreement and the Maritime Labour Convention'.

He said the ITF could provide hard evidence and asked for 'an immediate investigation into Sunrise Marine Enterprises Ltd for the unethical and illegal business practices and

mismanagement and misappropriation of funds due to Myanmar citizens, and that when they are found at fault, we would encourage their suspension or loss of MLC certification as a seafarer recruitment provider'.

Myanmar has suspended Sunrise while it investigates the ITF's claims. And at the end of 2020, discussions were continuing between HCM, the ITF and the NCSU and other affiliated unions to resolve these issues. ■



Filipino seafarers home after more than year at sea

Brazil inspector Ali Zini and his CNTTL union helped to repatriate a seafarer who was trapped working aboard the Western Eyde bulk carrier for 16 months

The seafarer had formally asked the ship's management company to leave the vessel and was told there was no guarantee he would be repatriated in the next port. So he contacted the ITF for help.

I met the crew when the Panama-flagged vessel arrived in Paranagua, Brazil on 30 August. I inspected the books to ensure that the seafarers had completed their contracts and that the company had paid all wages owing. I learned that the other seven seafarers had been on board for 13 months.

The company told me that a crew change would happen at the following port, instead. I warned that it was in breach of the MLC and the company quickly revised its position. The same week, the eight crew members disembarked in Paranagua and flew home to the Philippines, while a fresh Filipino crew replaced them. ■

Unpaid, 15 months on board

As the Panama-flagged towing vessel Diavlos Force headed for Norway, inspector Syver Grepstad in Bergen recalls being alerted by a seafarer's relative that the crew was not being paid

I started communicating with the crew (from Greece, Russia, the Philippines, India and Indonesia). They told me the vessel would reach Norway in early September and that they hadn't been paid for six months. Some of the crew had been on board since June 2019, almost 15 months.

We carried out our inspection in cooperation with the Norwegian Maritime Authority, who then detained the vessel in port over the outstanding wages (USD238,036). The ITF arrested the vessel a few days later to secure the claim for the crew.

The Greek owner told the crew that they might be able to go home if they dropped all wage claims, which the seafarers rejected. Fuel and provisions were starting to run low when the owner abandoned the ship in October. We contacted the P&I Club responsible for insuring the vessel and were able to find a solution.

Less than four weeks after reaching Norway, the crew went home and were paid four months' wages (USD139,475). We will pursue the outstanding money. ■

Twenty months on board, **stuck** in **berthing** stalemate

A stalemate around the berthing of two coal-carrying vessels in Chinese ports meant that 41 seafarers – some of whom had been on board over 20 months – were unable to go home. Abdulgani Y Serang, general secretary of the National Union of Seafarers of India, describes ITF and union efforts to resolve the situation



The Jag Anand, with 23 seafarers on board, and the Anastasia, with 18 on board, were unable to dock since June and August 2020, respectively. By mid-November 2020, 15 seafarers on the Jag Anand had completed 16 months of continuous service on board while the remaining eight had completed 13 months. A number had completed nearly 20 months. The entire crew of both vessels was mentally and physically exhausted and needed urgent relief.

The ITF urged the governments of China, India and Australia to collaborate and urgently end the stalemate, after the federation and NUSI repeatedly raised the issue with the company and official channels through the International Maritime Organization.

Although the pandemic greatly complicated the situation, ITF seafarers' and inland navigation section coordinator Fabrizio Barcellona said: "The fact is that the crew of the Jag Anand were already 15 months on board when they picked up this coal from Australia. The international maximum is 11 months at sea. The Australian authorities should not have allowed the vessels to sail without getting these seafarers home and replacement crew on board."

The ITF and NUSI put out a call for help for the seafarers. Many responded: the Indian government; the shipowner, who was trying to have the ship cargo discharged and offered to charter a flight for the crew change; and some neighbouring countries, who even offered to buy the coal in order that the ship could then move on and sign off the crew at the next convenient port.

At the end of December we were hopeful that the crew of the Jag Anand would arrive home in India in mid-January but there was no such good news about the Anastasia. ■

Big win for striking Bangladeshi maritime workers

Over 200,000 naujan (river navigation workers) won major improvements to their working lives after a strike against the Bangladesh Cargo Vessel Owners' Association. Ashiqul Alam Chowdhury, general secretary of the ITF-affiliated Bangladesh Noujan Shramik Federation (BNSF), reports



The wins came following a three-day strike in October 2020 by the river navigation workers, under the BNSF banner. Among the gains, employers accepted the maritime workers' long-standing argument for the payment of food allowances to crew aboard river navigation vessels.

This had become an emotive issue for us, and we were only asking what's written in the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) regarding food allowance for crew on board cargo vessels. The MLC requires employers to provide good quality food and drinking water food to ship workers. Larger vessels would typically have a qualified cook on board, but an adequate allowance is another way for employers to fulfil their requirements if the vessel is too small to have a cook and galley.

As part of the resolution of the dispute, the vessel owners' association agreed to progress an 11-point charter developed by the workers. The charter pushes for:

- the provision of appointment letters to workers

- issuing identity cards and service books
- ensuring social safety of workers
- payment of food allowances
- an end to extortion and robbery on vessels
- job formalisation for workers
- implementation of the 2016 pay scale

Just a year earlier, the employers had promised action on the charter, including the allowances, and the union called off its planned industrial action in November 2019. But the employers reneged on their promise.

This time things are different for the workers, partly because October's strike crippled the owners' cargo network. The Bangladesh Cargo Vessel Owners' Association operates 5,000 cargo ships along a river system that takes cargo to and from 50 mother vessels near the sea, through inland water routes to river ports and upstream terminals. The strike totally paralysed this system and that has made them take maritime workers seriously.

At a meeting in October employers and union officials, in the presence of the Labour and Employment Minister, agreed that workers on

various-sized vessels would immediately start being paid food allowances of between BDT 1000-1500 per month. Since then we have asked the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) to convene a tripartite meeting to discuss increasing this to a more realistic amount.

In another positive move since the strike, the Director General of Shipping has instructed the ship surveyor to ensure that appointment letters, service books and identity cards are included in his checklist and that all crew have these documents.

In 2021, our big campaign will be to win implementation of the agreement on social security for river navigation workers. We will continue to fight to end extortion and robbery on vessels and we will be negotiating the next wage agreement for our inland navigation workers. ■

Rules to prevent seafarer fatigue failing in practice

The system of regulating seafarers' hours of work and rest looks good on paper but is failing in practice, reveals new research by the World Maritime University. Katie Higginbottom, head of the ITF Seafarers' Trust, which funded the study, shares the key findings



The report reveals serious questions about the capacity of the current regulatory system to prevent fatigue among seafarers, which damages their health and wellbeing and increases the risks of maritime accidents.

It confirms that malpractices are widespread, undermining the credibility of Maritime Labour Convention and other international regulations relating to working hours. This is particularly worrying given the high number of seafarers serving well beyond their contractual terms and having to take on additional tasks as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The root cause of violations appears to be insufficient manning, especially during peak workload conditions. This suggests that flag states do not always fulfil their responsibilities, or ensure that shipowners carry out theirs, for the efficient and sufficient manning levels on board ships.

Shipping companies are more concerned about the negative consequences of failing inspections than their obligation to genuinely comply with international regulations. With seafarers' employment insecure and accompanied by financial incentives, a culture of adjustment rather than accuracy in records has become the norm. For seafarers, the sole reason for recording work/rest hours is to confirm compliance and avoid disruptions to the schedule, so they see it merely as a paper exercise.

Many companies appear uninterested in seafarers' feedback on the issue and flag state surveys are limited to reviewing

paperwork, with no verification of actual work on board. Inevitably, we must question the effectiveness of the International Safety Management (ISM) Code.

The system of regulation relies on port state control (PSC) for enforcement but PSC inspectors take on face value the accuracy of the records provided and rarely check them. And it may not be limited to hours of work and rest reports. The study found that international and regional maritime organisations, the shipping industry, maritime unions and seafarers themselves were convinced that any records are similarly susceptible to the practice of adjustment.

The report – 'A culture of adjustment' – recommends more research to determine safe manning levels for all operational conditions, a review of the effectiveness of the ISM code and consideration of the 'chronic mistrust between shore and ship personnel combined with the job insecurity characteristic of numerous seafarers' working contracts'.

Dave Heindel, chair of the ITF Seafarers' Trust, commented, "The findings are devastatingly comprehensive. Now the onus is on flag states, port states, industry and unions to come together for the benefit of the seafarers to facilitate cultural change and restore the credibility of international maritime regulations."

You can download 'A culture of adjustment' and its executive summary at the WMU website – https://commons.wmu.se/lib_reports/66/ ■

A great future for seafaring is in our hands

Dave Heindel, chair of the ITF's seafarers' section and secretary-treasurer of the Seafarers' International Union of North America (SIU), shares his thoughts with *Seafarers' bulletin* on the industry's future in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic



What brought you into the industry?

I am a second-generation seafarer. My father sailed as chief steward and when I became of age, he had me enrol in the SIU's Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education. It's a family affair – my two oldest sons also became seafarers.

What have your jobs taught you?

I started sailing in the engine room as an unlicensed rating and have sailed in all ratings until becoming a 3rd assistant licensed engineer in 1979. After that I came ashore to work as an official for the SIU.

I found sailing very satisfying, both emotionally and monetarily. The industry has changed since 1973 – with smaller crews, automation, constant training and umpteen regulations – and the romance of sailing has gone. But where else can a middle class or underprivileged young man or woman find a job that provides travelling around the world, a decent living and meeting interesting people?

It does have a dark side. With the proliferation of the flags of convenience system, seafarers can and do fall victim to unscrupulous shipowners and manning agents. Even with the Maritime Labour Convention providing minimum industry standards, there are many gaps which must be dealt with to keep the MLC relevant.

What has maritime learned from the coronavirus pandemic?

In my mind, the most important lesson learned is that we as an industry, both labour and employers, must bring maritime out of the shadows by educating the public on its vital links with their daily lives. Without public support, and national leaders who understand the importance of the maritime supply chain, we risk having more events like the ongoing crew change crisis, which has brought to light how vulnerable seafarers are. The fact that nations can sign up to the MLC yet in a crisis refuse to abide by it MUST be resolved.

Another lesson learned is that when we work together, we can have greater achievements.

Our meetings with industry provided a single position on dealing with coronavirus and the crew change crisis it created. While we haven't resolved the crisis completely, I believe we have achieved much more than we would have separately.

Are you optimistic for the future of seafaring?

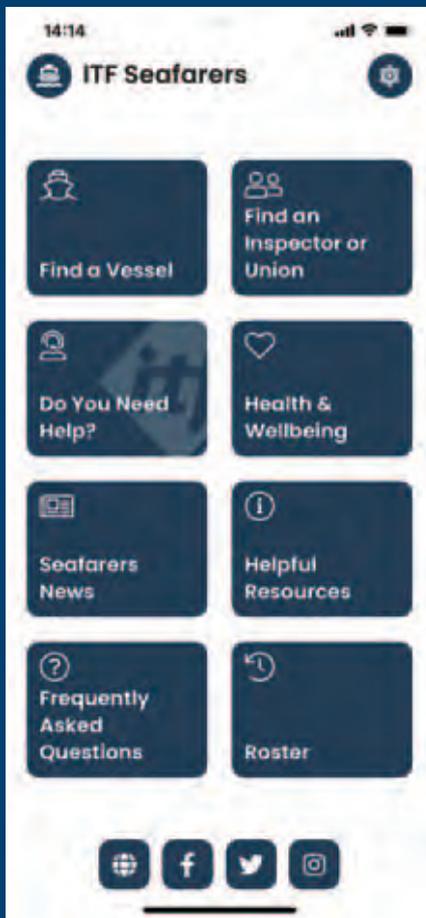
I believe the future of seafaring is great but it is in our hands.

There are many challenges – such as how we recruit and retain seafarers, which is vital to sustaining the industry, and learning how best to protect the environment from maritime pollutants.

As unions we have an obligation to ensure that our chosen profession is rewarding and provides a safe working environment. Industry has an obligation to work with us to find the balance of our expectations and its ability to compete within maritime and with other modes of transportation. ■

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 – 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

- Find contact details for the nearest ITF inspector, coordinator 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/WhatsApp/Viber +44 7523515097
Email 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?



www.facebook.com/itfseafarerssupport

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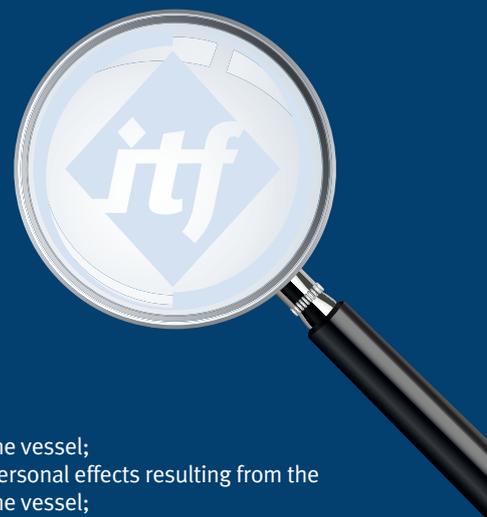
Getting hired Crewing agents

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**.
- **Make sure to keep copies of your contract, payslips and other correspondence from the shipowner and manning agent that relate to your conditions of employment, even after you have finished working on the vessel. You will need these as evidence in the event that anything goes wrong and you need to make a claim for wages or compensation.**

To find out if your ship is covered by a ITF-approved agreement, go to 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

ITF inspectors listings

3

NAME	ROLE	COUNTRY	PORT	OFFICE PHONE	MOBILE PHONE	E-MAIL
Hassen Mellis	Inspector	Algeria	Algiers	+213 21 65 31 87	+213 559 407 839	mellis_hassen@itf.org.uk
Roberto Jorge Alarcón	Coordinator	Argentina	Rosario	+54 (0) 11 4300 9700	+54 9 11 4414 5687	alarcon_roberto@itf.org.uk
Ian Bray	Coordinator	Australia	Fremantle	+61 2 92679134	+61 403 325 376	bray_ian@itf.org.uk
Matt Purcell	Assistant Coordinator	Australia	Melbourne	+61 3 9329 5477	+61 418 387 966	purcell_matt@itf.org.uk
Dan Crumlin	Inspector	Australia	Sydney	+61 2 92679134	+61 400 418 871	cumlin_dan@itf.org.uk
Sarah Maguire	Inspector	Australia	Gladstone		+61 434525416	maguire_sarah@itf.org.uk
Christian Roos	Inspector	Belgium	Zeebrugge/Ghent	+32 2 549 11 03	+32 486 12 38 90	roos_christian@itf.org.uk
Marc Van-Noten	Inspector	Belgium	Antwerp	+32 3 224 3419	+32 475 77 57 00	van-noten_marc@itf.org.uk
Rino Huijsmans	Inspector	Belgium	Antwerp	+32 3 224 3414	+32 473 97 31 95	huijsmans_rino@itf.org.uk
Ali Zini	Inspector	Brazil	Paranagua	+ 55 (61) 3322-3931	+55 41 99998 0008	zini_ali@itf.org.uk
Renialdo de Freitas	Inspector	Brazil	Santos	+ 55 (61) 3322-3931	+55 13 99761 0611	defreitas_renialdo@itf.org.uk
Vladimir Miladinov	Inspector	Bulgaria	Varna	+359 2 931 5124	+359 887 888 921	miladinov_vladimir@itf.org.uk
Peter Lahay	Coordinator	Canada	Vancouver	+1 604 251 7174	+1 604 418 0345	lahay_peter@itf.org.uk
Karl Risser	Inspector	Canada	Halifax	+1 902 455 9327	+1 902 237 4403	risser_karl@itf.org.uk
Nathan Smith	Inspector	Canada	Vancouver	+1 604 251 7174	+1 604 791 5216	smith_nathan@itf.org.uk
Vincent Giannopoulos	Inspector	Canada	Montreal	+1 514 931 7859	+1 514 970 4201	giannopoulos_vincent@itf.org.uk
Miguel Sanchez Enciso	Inspector	Colombia	Barranquilla	+57 310 657 3399	+57 310 657 3399	sanchez_miguel@itf.org.uk
Joachim Mel Djedje-Li	Inspector	Côte d'Ivoire	Abidjan	+225 21 35 72 17	+225 07 88 00 83	Djedje_Joachim@itf.org.uk
Romano Peric	Coordinator	Croatia	Dubrovnik/Ploce	+385 20 418 992	+385 99 266 2885	peric_romano@itf.org.uk
Luka Simic	Inspector	Croatia	Rijeka	+385(0)51 325 340	+385 97 793 9521	simic_luka@itf.org.uk
Milko Kronja	Inspector	Croatia	Sibenik	+385 22 200 320	+385 98 336 590	kronja_milko@itf.org.uk
Morten Bach	Inspector	Denmark	Copenhagen	+45 88 92 03 55	+45 21 64 95 62	bach_morten@itf.org.uk
Peter Hansen	Inspector	Denmark	Copenhagen	+45 36 36 55 85	+45 30 58 24 56	hansen_peter@itf.org.uk
Jaanus Kuiv	Inspector	Estonia	Tallinn		+372 52 37 907	Kuiv_Jaanus@itf.org.uk
Kenneth Bengts	Coordinator	Finland	Helsinki	+358 9 615 20 258	+358 40 455 1229	bengts_kenneth@itf.org.uk
Jan Örn	Assistant Coordinator	Finland	Turku	+358 9 613 110	+358 40 523 33 86	orn_jan@itf.org.uk
Ilpo Minkkinen	Inspector	Finland	Helsinki		+358 40 7286932	minkkinen_ilpo@itf.org.uk
Pascal Pouille	Coordinator	France	Dunkirk	+33 3 28 21 32 89	+33 6 80 23 95 86	pouille_pascal@itf.org.uk
Corine Archambaud	Inspector	France	Le Havre		+33 6 85 52 27 67	archambaud_corine@itf.org.uk
Geoffroy Lamade	Inspector	France	St Nazaire	+33 2 40 22 54 62	+33 660 30 12 70	lamade_geoffroy@itf.org.uk
Laure Tallonneau	Inspector	France	Brest	+33 2 98 85 21 65	+33 6 85 65 52 98	tallonneau_laure@itf.org.uk
Yves Reynaud	Inspector	France	Marseille		+33 6 07 68 16 34	reynaud_yves@itf.org.uk
Merab Chijavadze	Inspector	Georgia	Batumi	+995 422 270177	+995 5 93 261303	chijavadze_merab@itf.org.uk
Sven Hemme	Coordinator	Germany	Bremerhaven	+49 471 92189209	+49 151 27037384	hemme_sven@itf.org.uk
Susan Linderkamp	Assistant Coordinator	Germany	Bremen	+49 421 330 33 33	+49 1511 2 666 006	linderkamp_susan@itf.org.uk
Hamani Amadou	Inspector	Germany	Rostock	+49 381 670 0046	+49 170 7603862	amadou_hamani@itf.org.uk
Karin Friedrich	Inspector	Germany	Hamburg	+49 40 2800 6812	+49 170 85 08 695	friedrich_karin@itf.org.uk
Markus Winchmann	Inspector	Germany	Hamburg	+49 40 2800 6811	+49 151 18868438	winchmann_markus@itf.org.uk
Catherine Haizel	Inspector	Ghana	Tema		+233 266 457 793	haizel_catherine@itf.org.uk
Liam Wilson	Inspector	Great Britain	Scotland	+44 1224 210 118	+44 7539 171 323	wilson_liam@itf.org.uk
Tommy Molloy	Inspector	Great Britain	NW England	+44 151 639 8454	+44 776 418 2768	molloy_tommy@itf.org.uk
Stamatis Kourakos	Coordinator	Greece	Piraeus	+30 210 411 6610/6604	+30 6 9 77 99 3709	kourakos_stamatis@itf.org.uk
Costas Halas	Inspector	Greece	Piraeus	+30 210 411 6610/6604	+30 6944 297 565	halas_costas@itf.org.uk
Nikolaos Chalas	Inspector	Greece	Piraeus		+30 69420 35 881	Chalas_Nikos@itf.org.uk
Jason Lam Wai Hong	Inspector	Hong Kong, China		+852 2541 8133	+852 9735 3579	lam_jason@itf.org.uk
Jónas Gardarsson	Inspector	Iceland	Reykjavik	+354 551 1915	+354 892 79 22	gardarsson_jonas@itf.org.uk
B V Ratnam	Inspector	India	Visakhapatnam	+91 8912 502 695 / 8912 552 592	+91 9 8481 980 25	ratnam_bv@itf.org.uk
Chinmoy Roy	Inspector	India	Calcutta	+91 33 2439 6184	+91 98300 43094	roy_chinmoy@itf.org.uk
K Sreekumar	Inspector	India	Chennai	+91 44 2522 3539	+91 9381001311	kumar_sree@itf.org.uk
Louis Gomes	Inspector	India	Mumbai	+91 22 2261 8368	+91 8080556373	gomes_louis@itf.org.uk
Mukesh Vasu	Inspector	India	Kandla	+91 2836 226 581	+91 94272 67843	vasu_mukesh@itf.org.uk
Thomas Sebastian	Inspector	India	Kochi	+91 484 2666409	+91 98950 48607	sebastian_thomas@itf.org.uk
Michael Whelan	Inspector	Ireland	Dublin		+353 872501729	whelan_michael@itf.org.uk
Assaf Hadar	Inspector	Israel	Haifa	+972 48 51 22 31	+972 522 977 127	hadar_assaf@itf.org.uk
Francesco Di Fiore	Coordinator	Italy	Genoa	+39 10 25 18 675	+39 33 1670 8367	di fiore francesco@itf.org.uk
Gianbattista Leoncini	Inspector	Italy	Taranto	+39 99 4707 555	+39 335 482 703	leoncini_gianbattista@itf.org.uk
Paolo Serrettiello	Inspector	Italy	Naples	+39 81 265021	+39 335 482 706	serrettiello_paolo@itf.org.uk
Paolo Siliigato	Inspector	Italy	Trieste		+39 3484454343	siliigato_paolo@itf.org.uk
Fusao Ohori	Coordinator	Japan	Tokyo	+81 3 5410 8320	+81 90 6949 5469	ohori_fusao@itf.org.uk
Junya Ishino	Inspector	Japan	Nagoya	+81 52 655 5880	+81 90 5553 8193	ishino_junya@itf.org.uk
Shigeru Fujiki	Inspector	Japan	Chiba	+81 3 3735 0392	+81 90 9826 9411	fujiki_shigeru@itf.org.uk
Yoshihiro Toyomitsu	Inspector	Japan	Tokyo	+81 3 5410 8320	+81 90 5306 2494	toyomitsu_yoshihiro@itf.org.uk
Betty Makena Mutugi	Inspector	Kenya	Mombasa	+254 41 2230027	+254 721 425828	mutugi_betty@itf.org.uk
HK Kim	Coordinator	Korea	Incheon	+82 32 881 9880	+82 10 5441 1232	kim_hk@itf.org.uk
Bae Jung Ho	Inspector	Korea	Pusan	+82 51 463 4828	+82 10 3832 4628	bae_jh@itf.org.uk
Moon Hyeokjin	Inspector	Korea	Pusan	+82 51 469 0294	+82 10 4444 8436	hyeokjin_moon@itf.org.uk
Norbert Petrovskis	Inspector	Latvia	Riga	+371 677 09242	+371 292 15136	petrovskis_norbert@itf.org.uk
Andrey Chernov	Inspector	Lithuania	Klaipeda		+370 699 28198	chernov_andrey@itf.org.uk
Paul Falzon	Inspector	Malta	Valletta	+356 79969670	+356 79969670	falzon_paul@itf.org.uk
Enrique Lozano Díaz	Inspector	Mexico	Veracruz	+52 229 932 1367	+52 229 161 0700	lozano_enrique@itf.org.uk
Jose Ramirez	Inspector	Mexico	Manzanillo		+52 314 172 8089	ramirez_jose@itf.org.uk
Tomislav Markolović	Contact	Montenegro	Bar	+382 30 315 105	+382 69 032 257	markolovic_tomislav@itf.org.uk
Hamid Rachik	Inspector	Morocco	Casablanca	+212(0) 5 22 21 96 26	+212 (0) 6 48 13 09 57	rachik_hamid@itf.org.uk
Han Bo Tun	Contact	Myanmar	Yangon	+ 95 1 203874	+959 250 143 678	tun_han@itf.org.uk
Aswin Noordermeer	Inspector	Netherlands	Rotterdam		+31 6 53 337522	noordermeer_aswin@itf.org.uk
Debbie Klein	Inspector	Netherlands	Rotterdam		+31 6 53 182 734	klein_debbie@itf.org.uk
Gijs Mol	Inspector	Netherlands	Rotterdam		+31 622 89 08 77	mol_gijs@itf.org.uk
Koen Keehnen	Inspector	Netherlands	Rotterdam		+31 624 336109	keehnen_koen@itf.org.uk
Grahame McLaren	Inspector	New Zealand	Wellington	+64 4 801 7613	+64 21 292 1782	mclaren_grahame@itf.org.uk
Angelica Gjestrum	Coordinator	Norway	Oslo	+47 22 82 58 24	+47 9 77 29 357	gjestrum_angelica@itf.org.uk
Truls M Vik Steder	Inspector	Norway	Porsgrunn	+47 35 54 82 40	+47 90 98 04 87	steder_truls@itf.org.uk
Yngve Lorentsen	Inspector	Norway	Tromsø	+47 77 69 93 46	+47 414 01 222	lorentsen_yngve@itf.org.uk

Helping seafarers around the world



ITF HEAD OFFICE

LONDON, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7403 2733
Email: mail@itf.org.uk

ETF EUROPE

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM
Tel: +32 (0) 2 285 46 60
Email: etf@etf-europe.org

ITF AMERICAS

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRASIL
Tel: +55 (21) 2223.0410
Email: itf_americas@itf.org.uk

For full contact details of ITF inspectors go to www.itfseafarers.org/find_inspector.cfm

NAME	ROLE	COUNTRY	PORT	OFFICE PHONE	MOBILE PHONE	E-MAIL
Luis Carlos Fruto	Inspector	Panama	Cristobal/Balboa	+507 315 1904	+507 6617 8525	fruto_luis@itf.org.uk
Arvin Ivan Peralta	Inspector	Philippines	Manila		+63 919 096 7187	peralta_arvin@itf.org.uk
Joselito Pedaria	Inspector	Philippines	Cebu City	+63 32 256 16 72	+63 920 9700 168	pedaria_joselito@itf.org.uk
Adam Mazurkiewicz	Coordinator	Poland	Szczecin	+48 91 4239707	+48 501 539329	mazurkiewicz_adam@itf.org.uk
Grzegorz Daleki	Inspector	Poland	Gdynia/Gdansk	+48 58 6616096	+48 514 430 374	daleki_grzegorz@itf.org.uk
João de Deus Gomes Pires	Inspector	Portugal	Lisbon	+351 21 391 8181	+351 91 936 4885	pires_joao@itf.org.uk
Jose A. Claudio Baez	Inspector	Puerto Rico	San Juan	+1 212 425 1200	+1 787 318 0229	baez_jose@itf.org.uk
Adrian Mihalciou	Inspector	Romania	Constantza	+40 241 618 587	+40 722 248 828	mihalciou_adrian@itf.org.uk
Sergey Fishov	Coordinator	Russia	St Petersburg	+7 812 718 6380	+7 911 096 9383	fishov_sergey@itf.org.uk
Kirill Pavlov	Inspector	Russia	St. Petersburg	+7 812 718 6380	+7 911 929 04 26	pavlov_kirill@itf.org.uk
Olga Ananina	Inspector	Russia	Novorossiysk	+7 8617 612556	+7 9887 621232	ananina_olga@itf.org.uk
Petr Osichansky	Inspector	Russia	Vladivostok	+7 4232 401240	+7 914 790 6485	osichansky_petr@itf.org.uk
Rodion Sukhorukov	Inspector	Russia	St. Petersburg	+7 812 718 6380	+7 921 952 2562	sukhorukov_rodion@itf.org.uk
Vadim Mamontov	Inspector	Russia	Kaliningrad	+7 4012 656 840/475	+7 9062 38 68 58	mamontov_vadim@itf.org.uk
Daniel Tan	Contact	Singapore	Singapore	+65 63795666	+65 9616 5983	daniel_tan@seacare.com.sg
Gwee Guo Duan	Contact	Singapore	Singapore	+65 6390 1611	+65 9823 4979	duan_gwee@itf.org.uk
Luz Baz	Coordinator	Spain	Vigo		+34 660 682 164	baz_luz@itf.org.uk
Esteban Pereda	Inspector	Spain	Bilbao	+34 94 4037700	+34 688 75 53 35	pereda_esteban@itf.org.uk
Gonzalo Galan	Inspector	Spain	Las Palmas		+34 638 809 166	galan_gonzalo@itf.org.uk
Juan Garcia	Inspector	Spain	Valencia	+34 96 367 06 45	+34 628 565 184	garcia_juan@itf.org.uk
Marc Marti Gil	Inspector	Spain	Barcelona		+34 699 550 578	marti_marc@itf.org.uk
Ranjan Perera	Inspector	Sri Lanka	Colombo	+94 112 583040	+94 77 314 7005	perera_ranjan@itf.org.uk
Annica Barning	Coordinator	Sweden	Malmö		+46 70 57 49 714	barning_annica@itf.org.uk
Fredrik Bradd	Assistant Coordinator	Sweden	Umeå	+46 10 4803103	+46 761006445	bradd_fredrik@itf.org.uk
Göran Larsson	Inspector	Sweden	Gothenburg	+46 10 480 3114	+46 70 626 7788	larsson_goran@itf.org.uk
Haakan Andre	Inspector	Sweden	Norrköping	+46 8 791 41 02	+46 70 574 2223	andre_hakan@itf.org.uk
Tse-Ting Tu	Inspector	Taiwan, China	Kaoshiung	+886 7 5212380	+886 988513979	tu_tse-ting@itf.org.uk
Muzaffer Civelek	Inspector	Turkey	Istanbul		+90 535 663 3124	civelek_muzaffer@itf.org.uk
Nataliya Yefrimenko	Inspector	Ukraine	Odessa	+380 482 429 901	+380 50 336 6792	yefrimenko_nataliya@itf.org.uk
Dwayne Boudreaux	Coordinator	USA	Gulf Coast	+1 504 581 3196	+1 504 442 1556	boudreaux_dwayne@itf.org.uk
Enrico Esopa	Coordinator	USA	East Coast	+1 201 434 6000 (ext 240)	+1 201 417 2805	esopa_enrico@itf.org.uk
Jeff Engels	Coordinator	USA	West Coast		+1 206 331 2134	engels_jeff@itf.org.uk
Barbara Shipley	Inspector	USA	Baltimore/Norfolk	+1 757 622 1892	+1 202 412 8422	shipley_barbara@itf.org.uk
Corey Connor	Inspector	USA	Charleston		+1 843 469 5611	connor_corey@itf.org.uk
Eric White	Inspector	USA	Florida		+1 813-576 9805	white_eric@itf.org.uk
Martin D. Larson	Inspector	USA	Portland		+1 503 347 7775	larson_martin@itf.org.uk
Sam Levens	Inspector	USA	San Francisco		+1 415 490 8956	levens_sam@itf.org.uk
Shwe Tun Aung	Inspector	USA	Houston	+1 713 659 5152	+1 713 447 0438	aung_shwe@itf.org.uk
Stefan Mueller-Dombois	Inspector	USA	LA - S California	+1 562 493 8714	+1 562 673 9786	mueller_stefan@itf.org.uk
Michael Baker	Contact	USA	Cleveland	+1 216 781 7816	+1 440 667 5031	baker_michael@itf.org.uk

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. 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

It's a scam!

Recruitment fraud targeting seafarers is growing and getting smarter. If you see a great vacancy advertised on social media or receive a fantastic job offer out of the blue, beware. It's probably a scam and you should walk away immediately

If you receive an offer of a great job with fantastic wages by email or one of your social media accounts, delete it and warn your friends. It's a scam. Well-known shipping and cruise companies do not send out unsolicited job offers.

If there's a great job advertised on Facebook, WhatsApp or other social media platforms, ignore it. It's a scam. Legitimate companies do not advertise vacancies on social media.

Recruitment fraud is big business. It usually happens like this. The fraudsters set up a website, using a genuine company name and logo. They spread the word by social media, direct emails, adverts and free listings. And they wait to reel you in.

Once you apply for a vacancy or accept the fake job offer, they'll ask for a 'one-off' fee – perhaps for transport to the ship, a visa or an administration cost. This is illegal. Under the Maritime Labour Convention, you should not pay anything to get a job. And visa fees should be paid by the shipowner. Don't pay anything.

They'll also ask for personal information – date of birth, home address, a scan of your passport, bank account details. Don't ever give this out. They can use it to steal your identity and empty your bank account.

What else can you do?

- If you're looking for work, visit the websites of renowned cruise lines and big-name shipping companies. Look for warnings of fraud on the site and contact the official headquarters if you're in any doubt. Cruise operators' official websites normally offer a dedicated section with onshore and onboard vacancies where you can send your CV – and many operators run free recruitment events.
- Beware job vacancies 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.
- Carefully scrutinise any job ad on social media for signs it's a fraud (see page 28).

And coming soon ...

In response to the growing problem, the ITF now has a dedicated website ITF ShipBeSure (www.itfshipbesure.org) to advise seafarers on scams and rogue agents.

If you're in doubt, email the ITF at jobscam@itf.org.uk for advice.

Common signs of scams

- Any request for bank details
- Any request for scans of documents such as passport or qualifications
- A mobile telephone number, especially if it's the main contact for a supposed office
- An international dialling code that doesn't look right. For example, +234 is Nigeria
- Email addresses that do not include the company name
- Emails from companies with free email providers such as gmail, globomail, Yahoo
- Email addresses with a country domain that differs from the office's supposed location
- Misspelt and ungrammatical messages

Warning to seafarers: abandonment on the rise

Abandonment cases are at a record high because seafarers are reporting more instances of being owed two or more months' wages and more companies are going under because of the pandemic. The ITF and its unions can only help abandoned seafarers if you ask for their assistance, says inspectorate coordinator Steve Trowsdale

When things got tough financially in 2020, an increasing number of shipowners chose to cut their losses and disregard their obligations to seafarers under the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), often folding their business with crew still on board and thousands of dollars out of pocket. Some seafarers were trapped on board for two years or more and in appalling conditions.

Flag states that have ratified the MLC have responsibilities towards seafarers. They have a central role in ensuring that abandoned crew are provided with provisions, unpaid entitlements and a way home. And when seafarers have not been paid, the ITF often asks the flag authority to encourage or compel a shipowner to pay the outstanding entitlements. Yet in many cases we dealt with, the flag authorities took ineffective or

insufficient action or refused to act at all.

We strongly recommend that seafarers check all the available information they can about a vessel before signing anything. There are plenty of websites that show the position and destination details of vessels, and the IMO/ILO joint database lists all abandoned vessels.

Once you're on board, the non-payment of wages for weeks, then months, is a typical sign that an employer may be about to abandon the vessel and crew. They keep promising to pay the outstanding wages and get you home if your contracts are over. Then suddenly, they stop responding to your messages. The MLC requires that seafarers are paid at least monthly. If you go more than a month without being paid in full, this is a breach of the MLC.

Seafarers tell us how difficult it is to argue with their employer over wages because of the potential consequences if they raise concerns. They may be threatened just for contacting the ITF. They could be blacklisted by a shipowner or recruitment agent, which would mean no more contracts. And because under the MLC employers have to pay for the cost of getting seafarers to and from ships, an angry shipowner has the power to defer or deny repatriation.

It's easy to see why many seafarers choose not to rock the boat until they are absolutely desperate. But the ITF needs you to take the first step and ask for assistance before we are able to provide help and support. And if you fear you may be abandoned, you must make your complaint and contact the insurer as soon as possible to avoid losing out financially. ■



**If you need help or advice, email seafsupport@itf.org.uk
or visit the [ITF Seafarers Support Facebook page](#)
IMO/ILO database <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/seafarers/seafarersbrowse.home>**

Harrowing messages from abandoned crew



Most cases of abandonment happen in the Arab World. Mohamed Arrachedi, the ITF's network coordinator in the region, highlights two examples

'We are abandoned seafarers. We have not been paid our wages. We haven't had meal from yesterday evening.'

We received this text from a crew member on the cargo ship **Reggae**. It was first abandoned in Tunisia in 2019 before it moved to Turkey. The crew had written to the shipowner in March 2020 requesting repatriation, citing mental health concerns and five months' unpaid wages. They were ignored. By now they were without food and water and desperately needed help.

The ITF repeatedly called for the flag state, Comoros, to intervene. There was no response. For months the ship sailed from Tunisia to Greece and Turkey and back to Greece.

The Turkish seafarers could take no more. They disembarked in their home port on 1 April, with part of their wages owing. But the five Indian crew remained on board until 28 July, when they flew home to their families with all USD52,850 in wages in hand.

'The ship is out of diesel for lighting. I'm really afraid something bad will happen, I swear the crew could harm themselves.'

This seafarer was abandoned on the Tanzanian-flagged **Nader** in the Port of Suakin, Sudan in November 2019. Conditions on board the 43-year-old cargo vessel were terrible. For nine months the six Egyptian crew faced almost daily shortages of food, fresh water and fuel to keep the ship's lights on. With the port authorities' help, the ITF – particularly our contact Abdelhafiz – assisted the seafarers with fuel and provisions. The ITF helped the crew return home in July 2020, with USD60,308 in recovered wages. ■

Viet Tin 01 crew home but still waiting for wages

Twelve seafarers were stranded off the Malaysian coast without food, water or fuel when the Viet Tin 01 was abandoned by its Vietnamese owner. The ITF's Asia Pacific network coordinator and Hong Kong-based inspector, Jason Lam, praises union efforts to assist them

When the case came to the ITF's attention in June 2020, our affiliate the National Union of Seafarers Peninsular Malaysia (NUSPM) began providing food and fresh water, alongside assistance from the Vietnamese embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

"The lack of fuel left the crew without cooling in the soaring daytime heat, and without critical navigational lights during the nights," said NUSPM executive secretary Ikmal Azam Thanaraj Abdullah.

"The crew were in a terrible state. They were thirsty, hungry, and in great risk of being hurt or drowned if another vessel collided with them while they slept due to the lack of lighting onboard. This was an accident waiting to happen."

The NUSPM worked with the Malaysia Maritime Department and the relevant agent for permission to bring the crew onshore. They all tested negative for Covid-19. The ITF put the seafarers up in a hotel and covered their meal and accommodation costs while trying to get them paid and repatriated.

After an anxious two months, the Vietnamese crew finally arrived home in September. They are hoping that their owed wages will be paid from the sale of the vessel. ■

One ship, two abandoned crew

The ITF had to help and repatriate two crews from the same abandoned vessel within weeks, reports Luz Baz. She took over the case when the ITF inspector in Chile, Juan Villalon-Jones, died suddenly in November 2020, having helped the first crew go home



In June 2019, the Ecuadorian-flagged *Manantial* sailed from Guayaquil, Ecuador carrying a large crane to Valdivia, southern Chile. After adjustments to the crane at Callao, Peru, the journey continued but the crane fell overboard. The ship was arrested and put at anchorage in Concepcion Bay, Chile the following September, where it has remained since.

In February 2020, the crew called Villalon-Jones. They had been abandoned but weren't ready to begin legal action against the vessel. The inspector discovered the *Manantial* had already been seized by three Chilean courts. In July the crew contacted him again. Conditions on board were poor, the only food they had was provided by Ecuadorians living

in Chile and they hadn't been paid. Some had extended their contracts and had been on board over a year. It still took another month for the crew to officially request ITF assistance.

Villalon-Jones' conversations with the shipowner, Marboni Shipping Cia, led nowhere. He applied to the ITF Seafarers' Trust Covid emergency fund and was given the money to repatriate the 11 Ecuadorian seafarers on 28 September.

Just weeks later, the replacement crew contacted Villalon-Jones over the same problems, and asked the ITF to help.

I contacted the seafarers, the shipowner, the Agental local agency and the port and flag authorities. Agental agreed to send provisions and water on board urgently, but Marboni claimed that as the vessel was arrested it had no money to pay the wages.

The ITF Seafarers' Trust fund paid all the repatriation, testing and quarantine costs and the five seafarers arrived home on 26 November, still owed USD22,000 by Marboni. ■

Italy's inspectors force Palmali to pay crew on five abandoned vessels

Having racked up debts of more than USD900,000 and been declared bankrupt, Turkish/Azerbaijan shipowner Palmali abandoned many ships and their crew in the Mediterranean Sea in 2020. Livia Martini, ITF assistant coordinator in Italy, recounts the effort it took for Italian inspectors and unions to win justice for the Azeri, Russian, Ukrainian and Turkish seafarers on five Maltese-flagged vessels in three ports



In Oristano, the General Shikhlinsky and *Khosrov Bey* had been stranded since March 2020, with the entire crew unpaid for almost a year. In June the ITF supported the seafarers to arrest the ships and discovered that the P&I insurances were false. The General Shikhlinsky crew submitted all the documentation to support their claim for USD154,075.85 in owed wages and eventually a new P&I took over. The seafarers were all repatriated by October, and received payment of four months' salary. Most of the *Khosrov Bey* crew are now home but are still waiting for the court ruling because no new P&I appeared.

Some of the 13-strong Azeri crew of the *Zeynalbdin Tagiyev* had been on board in Venice for 16 months. The ITF persuaded the port authority, coastguard and others to provide food and assistance, and collected the proxies from the crew for a court arrest on their behalf. A bank agreed to pay the wages until October 2020 and cover the repatriation costs. The four seafarers were all home by early December.

In Ravenna, the crew of both the *Gobustan* and *Sultan Bey* were stranded. Our local contact, along with the coastguard and the local seafarers' welfare committee, assisted both crew and put pressure on the cargo receivers of the *Gobustan*. This resulted in the payment of four months' salary (totalling USD116,000). It took the *Sultan Bey* crew longer to make a legal claim as they were so scared of the owner. Both crews were repatriated at the end of October 2020. The *Gobustan* costs were paid by its P&I but as the *Sultan Bey* P&I was fake, the ITF paid and will claim the money back from the Maltese flag administration. Both vessels have been arrested by the Ravenna court and the crews are waiting for their final payments from the auction.

*****In February 2021, over USD3.2 million is still owed to seafarers once employed across 12 of Palmali's ships in Italy and Turkey, where six ships were abandoned in May 2020 with little food, water or fuel for the seafarers trapped on board.***** ■

If you think you are at risk of abandonment, haven't been paid for two months or more or supplied with food and other necessities and want to be repatriated, act quickly. Make a complaint and directly contact the insurer, or ask the ITF to apply on your behalf. Otherwise, you could lose out financially.

ITF inspectors here for you 24/7

The ITF's inspectors continued to be on call 24/7 to provide ongoing support for seafarers in need. *Seafarers' bulletin* introduces the newest inspectors, profiles the Japanese team and provides an update on the ITF's regional networks of union contacts

Meet the newest inspectors

Ian Bray

(Fremantle, Australia)

Ian sailed as a rating from 1984 to 2003, when he was elected to the Maritime Union of Australia as assistant branch secretary, Western Australia. In 2010 he became the union's assistant national secretary and in January 2021 was appointed as ITF coordinator Australia. He wants to make a difference by upholding seafarers' rights and utilising his campaigning experience.



Dan Crumlin

(Sydney, Australia)

Dan was a seafarer and docker and relieved as a branch official with the Maritime Union of Australia. He believes that without the ITF there would be no dignity and decency of employment for seafarers. He became an inspector to protect and improve seafarers' working and living conditions and defend their rights.



Assaf Hadar

(Haifa, Israel)

Assaf is a 49-year-old captain. After gaining a BA degree in economics, he sailed for 12 years in the Israeli merchant fleet. A member of the Israeli Sea Officers Union, he has always fought for the rights and wellbeing of his crew and as an ITF inspector will continue to help and support seafarers.



Arvin Ivan Peralta

(Manila, Philippines)

Arvin graduated from the Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific and has worked as a shipbuilding superintendent, marine engineer, shipboard training officer, maritime instructor and assessor. He welcomes the opportunity to serve the seafarers who contributed to his education.



Spotlight on the Japanese team

Surrounded by the sea, Japan's trade volume is 99.6 percent supported by sea transport. It imports crude oil from the Persian Gulf, iron ore from South America and Australia and grains from South and North America. Japan exports automobiles, electronic parts and steel worldwide.

Container ships and bulk carriers employing many Asian seafarers arrive daily at Japan's ports en route to other countries. Seafarers from around the world work on the visiting cruise ships. And Japan's good fishing grounds attract countless fishing boats. Some of these seafarers earn below international standards or work over-contract, even before the Covid-19 epidemic hit.

Four ITF inspectors from seafarers and dockers unions assist seafarers in Japan. Their unions have established reporting systems with port state control inspectors.



Fusao Ohori (Tokyo) became an inspector in 2002 and has been a coordinator since 2011. He has worked both as a marine officer and engineer and is familiar with seafarers' circumstances. He has completed fishing and cruise ship training in the ITF and also handles cases of seafarers who have been abandoned.



Junya Ishino (Nagoya) was born into a family of seafarers and has worked in the All-Japan Seamen's Union (JSU) since 2012. It was this union work that inspired him to become an inspector. He understands what young crews are seeking on board and keeps communications open with them.



Shigeru Fujiki (Chiba) was a dockworker for about 12 years. He became an officer with Zenkoku-Kowan (National Federation of Dockworkers Unions of Japan) and was appointed an ITF inspector. He respects seafarers because Japan has relied on exports and imports by ship. He also protects dockworkers in ports of convenience.



Yoshihiro Toyomitsu (Tokyo) became an ITF inspector in 2018, after working with the JSU's international affairs unit for 15 years. His assigned port is in one of the world's busiest areas, with seafarers from many nationalities and cultures passing through. He will do his best to protect seafarers' rights and win decent work for them.

Esteban Pereda

(Bilbao, Spain)

Esteban was a part-time ITF inspector in Bilbao from 1994-2001. He then worked in the ELA Basque trade union in Bilbao and the Bizkaia area, covering port operations and liaising with shipping agents, forwarding agents, dockers and the port authority. Esteban is now a full-time inspector and eager to assist seafarers with their problems.



Luka Simic

(Rijeka, Croatia)

After the Maritime Secondary School in Bakar, Luka spent five years at the University of Rijeka's Faculty of Maritime Studies and then three years as a deck officer on LNG vessels. Since 2015, he's been president of the youth section of the Seafarers' Union of Croatia. As an inspector, he thinks his experience and knowledge will help him contribute to improving seafarers' rights.



Rodion Sukhorukov

(St Petersburg, Russia)

The 36-year-old followed his father and grandpa into a sea career. Rodion graduated from Admiral Makarov's State Maritime Academy, underwent practical training at a shipyard and shipping companies and worked for more than 10 years in international transport companies. Hearing about seafarers' problems led him to become an ITF inspector, responsible for ocean cruise ships and the river cruise sector.



Eric White

(Florida, USA) Eric joined the ITF so that he can use his maritime experience for the good of seafarers everywhere, to see that all crews are treated fairly and equally. He spent eight years at sea, leaving his last ship, Green Bay, as chief engineer.



Han Bo Tun

(Yangon, Myanmar) Bo was a founding member of IFOMS, Myanmar's first seafarers' union, and remains an executive council member. He's been helping seafarers for around 10 years, and feels humbled to become an ITF contact, able to represent exploited seafarers who don't have a voice. He will do his utmost to seek the best solution for seafarers in difficulty and improve their lives.



ITF networks at heart of Covid-19 response

The ITF's contact networks operate to assist seafarers in countries and ports where there are no ITF inspectors and work to ensure that shipowners are complying with their obligations to provide decent pay and onboard working and living conditions. The contacts are nominated by ITF affiliated unions

Latin America/ Caribbean network

The network operates where the ITF does not have inspectors, in countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Guyana, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. It is

building strength in the region by supporting seafarers requiring assistance and providing solidarity action with dockers. The network has been actively involved in ITF campaigns.

In November 2020, the ITF family was devastated to receive the news that Juan Villalon-Jones, the Latin America/Caribbean network coordinator, had passed away. Juan was a consummate professional, an accomplished inspector and a friend to all seafarers, and we mourn his passing.



Contact the Latin
America & Caribbean
network coordinator:

Steve Trowsdale (London)
Email: seafsupport@itf.org.uk

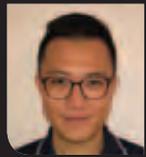
(14 contacts, in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Nicaragua, Peru, Trinidad & Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela)

Asia Pacific network

Our contacts have provided concrete support and assistance to seafarers in their local country and established the regional network. They do this on a voluntary basis and are nominated by their organisation.

As of 30 September 2020, the network had completed 41 cases this year. These include abandonment in Thailand and Malaysia, claims for unpaid wages, delayed home allotments, crew change and repatriation issues, work injury and a request for medical treatment. We recovered around USD346,000 in backpay for seafarers.

During the pandemic, the network coordinator has kept the contacts up to date on crew change policies in different countries so that they can provide accurate information when assisting seafarers.



Contact the Asia Pacific network coordinator:

Jason Lam (Hong Kong)
Tel: +852 9735 3579
Email: lam_jason@itf.org.uk

(8 contacts across Bangladesh, Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Thailand)

West Africa network

Between January and March 2020, contacts were busy visiting FOC vessels that called at their ports, particularly in Bissau, Abidjan, San Pedro, Lomé, Dakar and Cotonou. From March to July 2020, when the pandemic was at its peak in our region,

governments closed ports, borders and airports except for essential cargoes. We advised our contacts to keep safe at home and to liaise with the port, labour and health authorities if there was an emergency with a vessel. Gradually life returned to the ports and our contacts were able to return to their routines.

By the end of October our contacts had visited over 50 vessels and handled cases of sickness, owed wages, hospitalisation and repatriation due to expiration of contracts.



Contact the West Africa network coordinator:

Bayla Sow (Burkina Faso)
Email: seafsupport@itf.org.uk

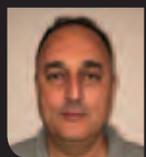
(12 contacts across Benin, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Togo)

Arab World and Iran network

The ITF Arab World and Iran network is powered by activists from unions across the region who are concerned about seafarers' welfare. Their tireless work is responsible for a large share of the USD6,213,683 the ITF recovered in the region in 176 cases of unpaid wages for seafarers in 2020.

Our region deals with the largest number of abandonment cases. Between June and December 2020, the ITF and the network contacts assisted more than 135 seafarers across 12 ships to return to their families.

We now have contacts for the first time in Libya, Sudan and Egypt and more contacts in place in Iraq and Oman. Further training and education for our team is planned for 2021 and we are building new and consolidating existing relationships with the region's maritime authorities.



Contact the Arab World & Iran network coordinator:

Mohamed Arrachedi (Spain)
Tel: +34 629 419 007
Email: arrachedi_mohamed@itf.org.uk

(31 contacts across Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen)

SCAM ALERT

ABL Shipping Ltd & Maritime Centre UK

We have been alerted by a number seafarers that a **scam** is operating where these companies are offering fake jobs and charging fees for unnecessary and fake documentation. The scammers are using websites like www.ablshippingltd.com and www.maritimecenterltd.com and emails from these addresses

DON'T GET CAUGHT BY THEM

Maritime Centre UK and the website www.maritimecenterltd.com are **NOT** connected to Maritime Centre Ltd, which is a company registered in the UK

If you have any concerns about a job offer please contact us at jobscam@itf.org.uk before you give them any personal details, documents or money



Job scams rife on social media – seafarer beware

Been offered a job out of the blue on Facebook? Seen a great job advertised on WhatsApp? It's almost certainly a scam. They're just out to steal your money or your identity. Steve Trowsdale, ITF inspectorate coordinator, receives thousands of messages a year from seafarers who've been scammed

Beware dream job offers: they're too good to be true

Two victims of recruitment fraud agreed to share their stories anonymously to help other seafarers avoid falling into the same trap

Seasoned seafarer Captain X was unemployed after 29 years in the same company. Ms Y decided to move into maritime. They were both looking for jobs and fell for offers which came out of the blue.

Captain X was contacted via LinkedIn, Ms Y on her work email address. Someone claiming to work for a legitimate maritime organisation outlined great-sounding jobs.

Captain X – a two-year contract as master of a container ship with Vroon Offshore Services Ltd, a monthly salary of £12,550 (USD15,843), two months on/off, two months' leave on full pay and a housing allowance. Ms Y – a reservation agent with Maritime Transport Ltd, working from home, tax-free monthly salary of EUR3,962 (USD4,471) and a EUR1,081 (USD1,220) monthly 'feeding' allowance.

The two companies are legitimate but had absolutely nothing to do with the recruitment.

The job descriptions, application forms and subsequent contracts all had the real companies' logos and correct postal

addresses but the fraudsters faked information and contact details and made obvious mistakes, including using the wrong name for Ms Y. She Googled the company and was reassured that her correspondence came from genuine employees. She didn't know that the fraudsters had simply set up fake email addresses and telephone numbers in the employees' names.

Captain X and Ms Y signed their contracts in May 2020. Then the requests for money began.

Captain X was emailed by someone claiming to be from the UK Immigration Service, asking him to pay £1,190 (USD1,500) for a UK National Insurance number, even though he would be working at sea. (You would never have to pay for this.) He forwarded the email and contract to his lawyer, who judged it to be legitimate. So Captain X transferred the money.

Then Captain X was told the NI number could not be processed until he paid £2,400 (USD3,030) for the 'British National Insurance Scheme' (this doesn't exist). The contact

insisted that the payment should be made to Captain X himself using a UK address and the sender must be the captain's next of kin or close friend. Captain X was told that once the NI number was released, he could immediately withdraw the funds. Alarmed, Captain X contacted his lawyer, who told him not to send the money and, after investigating, confirmed it was a fraud.

Ms Y was asked to pay EUR399 (USD450) for a permit to work from home. She felt uneasy because it had to be paid via Western Union to an officer in Guinea but was assured by her contact that banks were working differently because of the pandemic. She paid the money and received the permit – a certificate issued by the International Maritime Labour Union. She couldn't find it on Google (it doesn't exist) and then came a second request for a permit fee. She contacted the ITF's Job Scam helpline for advice and learned that the whole thing was a scam.

Between them, Captain X and Ms Y had been scammed out of more than £1,500 (USD1,956). ■

Scammers are getting smarter – and so must you. Once it was just emails, adverts and fake websites, now they will also exploit you through Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Instagram and other social media platforms. Facebook is by far the most common and trying to report it to the company is very difficult.

The way the fraudsters contact you is changing but the essence of the scam stays just the same. They promise you a new job that turns out to be non-existent. They rob you of your money and sometimes your identity. They hook you in and bleed you dry. You're left feeling frightened and ashamed for falling for their lies.

They use the names of legitimate companies and set up fake websites, false phone

numbers and email addresses using free providers. The real companies have no knowledge of the fake ones. Or the scammers set up entirely fake companies.

Website domains are not doing their job at policing the sites registered with them. The ITF recently produced evidence which closed down two websites operated by scam companies ABL Shipping Ltd and Maritime Centre UK.

Sometimes the job is real enough but it turns out to be hell. You go unpaid, your documents are taken away from you, you're abandoned. And you've paid for the pleasure.

When you tell us about a scam, we do what we can to expose it or shut it down. But the

scammers will usually just set up under a different guise. The most important way to stop them is by being alert to the signs in the first place.

In 2021, the ITF is launching a dedicated website called ShipBeSure, which you will be able to find at www.itfshipbesure.org. We will use it to rate manning agents so that you can easily check whether they're to be trusted or not. And it will provide a list of individuals and agents we know are fraudsters. ■

Conman leaves seafarers high and dry in Turkey

At the beginning of July 2020, 20 Ukrainian seafarers signed employment contracts through Ukrainian manning agent Artur Kharatyan, the founder of Kharatyan Crew Management, to work on board the Arif Kaptan and Rachel Borchard. They had each paid Kharatyan between USD1,500 and USD7,000



They were taken to a hotel in Karasu, Turkey, where they were supposed to join the ships. But the days passed, the crew change didn't happen. The seafarers became suspicious. After two weeks, Kharatyan switched his phone off. The crew discovered that their mounting hotel bills had not been paid. The hotel owner seized their passports to guarantee that the debt would be settled. The seafarers were now stuck in Turkey.

In early August, 14 of them returned home to

Ukraine at their own expense. The remaining six were unable to pay the hotel debts and recover their passports; some couldn't afford even to get home.

The Ukrainian vice-consul in Istanbul won a reduction in the debt. With assistance from the ITF, the Marine Transport Workers' Trade Union of Ukraine (MTWTU) was then able to cover the debt and buy out the seafarers' passports.

"Money was sent to the crew to buy food and basic necessities and we booked the next available flight home," said MTWTU first vice-chairman Oleg Grygoriuk. "Given the crew had prepared to be months at sea, we bought extra baggage and ensured they had transfers from the hotel to Istanbul airport and from Kiev Borispol airport to Odessa."

By 12 August, the six seafarers were safely back in Odessa.

But the story didn't end there. When the MTWTU contacted the ships' owners, they discovered that neither had ever had any

relations with Kharatyan Crew Management, and that the Arif Kaptan had been non-operational for three years. They also found out that Kharatyan had been facing criminal proceedings for years for extortion and bribing of seafarers.

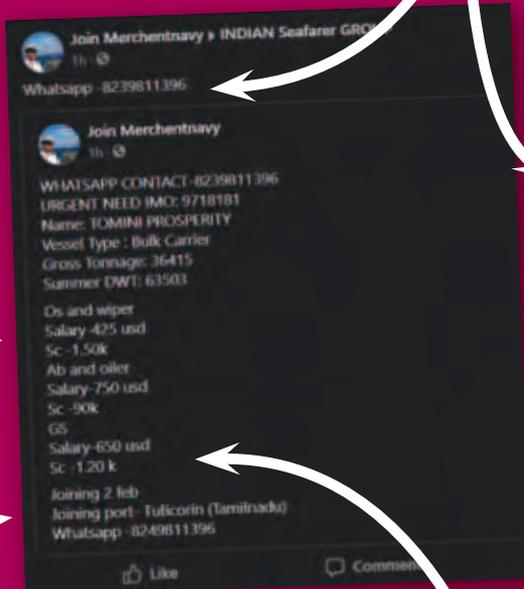
The conned seafarers joined over 50 other Kharatyan victims to seek help from law enforcement authorities to stop him. The story received wide publicity in the Ukrainian media.

One of the 20 seafarers, cook Valeriy Rak, said, "As for the very first voyage, that was a really bad, bitter experience, but what can I do? Thanks to the ITF, we are back. We wanted to make some money but were unfortunate. It is rather difficult to find employment during this hard time – we would have taken any job."

Grygoriuk commented, "We hope it serves as a cautionary tale for other seafarers to check out a potential place of work – a ship – before going anywhere or trusting suspicious intermediaries. As always – contact your union... We are here for you." ■

HOW TO READ AN ADVERT FOR SIGNS OF A SCAM

The wages are below what they would be on a vessel with an ITF agreement



The joining info is wrong - looking up the vessel showed it wasn't even arriving in Tuticorin until February 21

It is illegal to make a seafarer pay a service charge (shown here as sc) – in this case, for the AB it would be USD1,200

No legitimate company would use WhatsApp

A quick search shows the company doesn't exist (but MSC Cruises does)



This address is in fact the headquarters of Princess Cruises

* Read more on the common signs of a scam on page 8 of the *Seafarers' bulletin* pullout section.

If you're unsure, contact your union or email the ITF at jobscam@itf.org.uk for advice.

Help to stay safe and well in a crisis

During the pandemic, ITF affiliated unions and others have continued responding to the health and welfare needs of seafarers. They and the federation are also adapting their programmes to address the growing pressure seafarers are experiencing as a result of the crew change crisis. Dr Syed Asif Altaf, ITF wellbeing programme coordinator, takes a closer look

Experiencing mental health issues? New ITF guidance is here to help

Shockingly high levels of depression and anxiety experienced by seafarers were revealed by an ITF/ITF Seafarers' Trust study in 2019 – and the Covid-19 pandemic is creating even more uncertainty and fear

The study revealed that a quarter of seafarers reported being depressed, while 17 percent reported being anxious. So we started the Reflect, Recognise and Reach out campaign, which has three key messages.

REFLECT on the challenges you are facing. It is vital to understand that you are not alone. Accept that there are events you cannot control. During this difficult time, it is normal to experience some degree of fear, worry, and stress and we all need to take care of ourselves. Stress is a normal part of life but too much for too long can lead to physical and mental illness, putting your entire wellbeing at risk. Chronic stress can increase the risk of developing depression and other mental health problems.

There are steps you can easily take to relieve stress at work and at home and regain control.



Experiencing mental health issues? New ITF guidance is here to help *continued* >



RECOGNISING the signs and symptoms of stress at an early stage is the key to managing it better. Stress affects the human body in multiple ways. If you cannot sleep, have constant headaches, have lost your appetite and are feeling lonely, frustrated and sometimes very angry, these could be signs

of stress. Everyone reacts differently so your symptoms may differ from someone else's.

Look for information on the ITF Wellbeing and Seafarers' Trust social media platforms. The ITF and Norwegian Seafarers' Union (NSU) are organising a regular Facebook live session on mental health and wellbeing issues, including managing stress.

REACH OUT and get the support you need. This is particularly important if:

- you are feeling low through most of the day continuously for more than two weeks;
- anxiety is interfering with your daily routine; and/or
- you feel like you cannot regulate your emotions.

Talk to a friend or family member about your feelings. If you still feel unwell and develop thoughts of self-harm, you must seek support from outside. See a medical professional or call the 24/7 helpline services that are

available in many countries.

ITF affiliated unions like NUSI, AMOSUP and NUSS have counselling services available for seafarers and their families, and some shipping companies also provide them.

Find information about available services in the ITF Seafarers' wellbeing directory at <https://www.itfseafarers.org/en/wellbeing-directory>.

The ITF has also developed simple, practical guidance sheets on managing stress and other wellbeing issues – download them at <https://www.itfseafarers.org/en/guidance-factsheets>.

Seek guidance through the ITF's Seafarers App (downloadable free from Google Play and the Apple store) and on the ITF Wellbeing Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ITFWellbeing>. ■

Being positive in a crisis

Dr Syed Asif Altaf talks to Jebson Gamido, executive director of Positibong Marino Philippines Incorporated (PMPI), the world's only network of HIV positive seafarers



What inspired you to set up PMPI?

It comes from personal experience of stigma and discrimination and the need to fight injustice and pursue dreams regardless of a person's HIV status. Especially now, with the advancement of medicine and therapy, the world needs to see that people living with HIV can participate in society as productive people.

What do you want to achieve through PMPI? Healthy seafarers tend to be happy seafarers, and vice versa. Our mission is to empower seafarers, their families and the wider maritime industry, through education and the promotion of health and wellbeing, in order to attain continuous employment and communities free from stigma and discrimination.

How do you tackle recruiters' discrimination against HIV positive seafarers? We have created leaders who will help coach people in distress on how to go about disclosure, medical examination and their rights through providing confidential counselling and coaching face-to-face or online. We also believe that peaceful negotiations can help educate shipowners and others in power about the advancements in law and medicine related to HIV/AIDS, therefore encouraging them to be more inclusive and to hire seafarers living with HIV.

During our first three years, we have seen many successes but prejudice can be very hard to overcome. For example, a company refused to re-hire a member of its tanker

crew after finding out he was positive for HIV. When the seafarer contacted us, we set up a high-level meeting with the shipping agency, their lawyer, the government and the seafarer but still the agency refused to hire him. But with support from PMPI, the seafarer found a job with another company on an Italian-flagged vessel which supports non-judgemental fair testing and confidentiality.

How has PMPI supported seafarers during the Covid-19 pandemic? The ITF Seafarers' Trust COVID-19 Emergency Fund* supported our three-month Pantawid Filipino Seafarers Project to aid, empower and boost the morale of seafarers affected by the pandemic. From July to the end of October, our dedicated group of volunteers had provided some 1,000 seafarers with essential kits, free shuttle services and free pocket wi-fi internet; distributed snacks to seafarers and medical front-liners; run a vaccination campaign; and established a partnership to provide free training for seafarer certification.

And the future? With support and mentoring from the ITF and other partners, we will focus on the short- and long-term impact of Covid-19 on seafarers' mental health and wellbeing, and will promote the ITF's Reflect, Recognise and Reach Out campaign. We'll also work with AMOSUP trade union and others to provide education and counselling services to seafarers and their families.

Read more about the Trust's emergency fund on page 34. ■

Bond between dockers and seafarers stays strong

In his new role as ITF dockers section senior assistant, Steve Biggs looks at how Covid-19 has challenged the historic bond between seafarers and dockers

Dockers and seafarers share a unique and historic bond. Both have difficult and dangerous jobs to do onboard ships 24/7 and in extreme weather conditions. The interaction between the two is critical in keeping everybody healthy and safe. And there is a long tradition of dockers supporting seafarers who are treated badly by rogue employers.

My first job as a docker in the early 1990s was to go on board a feeder ship to insert twistlocks into the containers to lock them in place, a process we called padding. The other dockers in my gang, including my father, told me to bring down packs of gloves and spare overalls.

When I arrived on board I soon realised why. The crew had little or no protective clothing and what they had was poor quality, so even the sometimes ill-fitting clothing we gave them was very well received.

I have always enjoyed conversing with crew about their journeys and welcomed their offers of food, tea and sometimes something stronger.

The pandemic has made such interactions extremely challenging. At the time of the outbreak, I was working in the UK port of Southampton. Most of the large vessels that called there had come from China, where the virus had originated. This led to fears among dockers, much of it fuelled by a lack of industry and government information and guidance, of going onboard and interacting with the crew.

As dockers were classed as key workers and critical to keeping the economy moving, our union reps worked with management to put in place a Covid-19 agreement based on Public Health England guidance and our working experience.

We also liaised with the ITF dockers section to ensure we applied best practices everywhere. This included limiting the number of personnel boarding a vessel, protocols for lashers and keeping a safe distance from the crew.

The situation was quickly reversed when China all but eradicated the virus and the UK infection rate increased rapidly – ship crews now wanted protection from us.

Crews had worn masks onboard right from the start of the outbreak and now required dockers to do the same, and even have temperature checks. We didn't want to wear masks. The lashers were working in hot weather and masks made this uncomfortable, while the checkers needed to keep in radio contact with crane drivers and the control team, and masks muffled their speech.

We finally agreed a compromise. Dockers would have our temperatures taken but wouldn't wear masks, while crew members would enter the lashing gantries from the ship's outboard side and therefore be working behind and at a safe distance from us. This has worked well so far. ■

Seafarers freed from slavery conditions in Denmark

Two Ghanaian seafarers who were treated like slaves for more than three years in Denmark have been freed and returned home, thanks to collaboration between the ITF, the police and the Danish Centre against Human Trafficking. ITF inspector Morten Bach reports



When the case came to the attention of the police and the human trafficking centre, I was asked to examine the men's wages and employment contracts and learn about their situation.

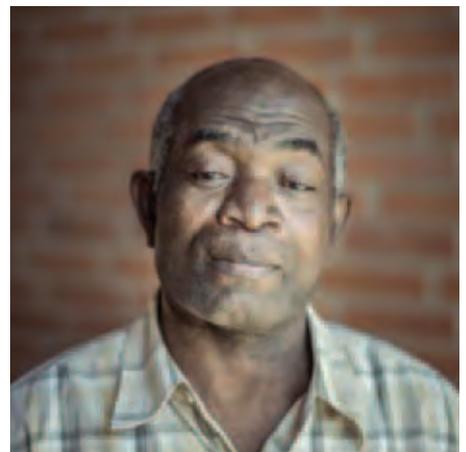
Ghanaians Reuben Kotei and Justice Numo travelled to Denmark in the belief that they would sail back home as ship captains. They were cruelly duped.

For more than three years, they worked under slave-like conditions aboard the Helene, a Belize-flagged fishing vessel, in the Danish village of Thyborøn. They lived on board and were paid just 1,200 euros (USD1,460) per month while working 11-hour days, six days a week. Their only contact with their families was through their iPads. The shipowner withheld their passports and travel documents. When their work and residency permits expired in

April 2017, he warned the men not to contact the authorities, as they no longer had a legal right to remain in Denmark.

Following our intervention, the employer was charged with human trafficking and violation of the Danish Aliens Acts. The prosecuting authority sought imprisonment, fines and compensation on behalf of the seafarers, as well as confiscation of the Helene.

The shipowner was sentenced in early January 2021 to an 18-month conditional prison sentence and fined three million Danish kroner (USD491,000). He was convicted only of usury (lending money at exorbitant interest rates). The court gave no direction about payment of the men's wages. We are exploring how we might be able to help them. The outcome is frustrating but at least the men are home safely. ■



ITF contact wins unpaid wages and repatriation for crew

The local ITF contact worked strenuously to negotiate with civic and marine authorities to resolve the case of a crew abandoned and unpaid in Guinea Bissau, West Africa, recalls Gonzalo Galan, ITF inspector in Las Palmas, Spain and member of the ITF FishSupport inspectorate network

Sick fisher dies while fishing continues

The tragic death of a Peruvian fisher off the coast of Uruguay is sadly unsurprising, as the fishing grounds around South America's Atlantic coast are a growing hotbed of exploitation and human rights violations, says ITF fisheries coordinator, Rossen Karavatchevy

On 2 November, the Portuguese-flagged *Verdemilho* docked into Montevideo port, Uruguay. On board was a Peruvian national who had died after being sick for more than 30 days without being brought in for treatment.

The man's shipmates told Adan Suarez of the Transport Workers' Union (TWU) and ITF contact for Uruguay that the captain had refused to enter the port because the seafarer presented symptoms of Covid-19. If test results were positive, he would have to put the vessel in quarantine and be unable to continue fishing. The fisher may still be alive today if the captain had put his health above profit and taken him to a doctor in Montevideo.

A furious Suarez said, "The TWU has been



fighting cruel conditions for the tens of thousands of fishers who come into our port to offload their catch.

"But even we were shocked when we got hold of the *Verdemilho* crew's employment contracts. There in black and white: they actually say to these workers, 'you will work 18 to 20 hours per day, every day', 'you will have little rest', 'you will make no more than 600 dollars per month'. The crew even have to pay their own social security and health insurance.

"Worst of all, they said that if a crew member is injured or sick and has to come ashore to be taken to a hospital...he and his family would have to pay all of the costs. This employer

would take what little money they had for the crime of being ill.

"The company even tried to cover up the death and silence the fisher's family. It wanted to pay USD15,000 to his daughter in exchange for her not making a complaint of negligence and violation of human rights against the company. The fisher's brother will now file a lawsuit against the company."

As fisheries around the Falkland Islands/Islands Malvinas are disputed, some jurisdictions are so keen to sell fishing rights that they ignore the obvious abuse of workers happening right outside their ports. Since 2018, at least 17 crew members have died on board foreign fishing vessels around Uruguay's waters. ■



In early April, four Bangladeshi and four Indonesian crew members of the Dominica-flagged *Tian Yi He 6* put in a call for assistance to the ITF FishSupport team and the Amigos Irmaos dos Homens do Mar (AIHM) union in Guinea Bissau.

Officially listed in the flag state documents as fisheries patrol, in practice the vessel is a huge fish factory and transshipment ship. It had been abandoned in January by the Chinese shipowner and the crew had not been paid since. None of them had employment contracts. The vessel was in very poor condition. They wanted to be repatriated.

Following a request from ITF contact Januario

Jose Biague from the AIHM, the Maritime and Ports Institute detained the vessel until the wages were paid and the crew was repatriated. He also succeeded in getting the seafarers placed in an aparthotel as they feared for their safety on board.

The salaries owed amounted to USD53,228 – USD14,100 to the Indonesian crew and USD33,800 to the Bangladeshi crew. The Indonesians received their wages in full but could not be repatriated until 2 October, due to the Covid-19 crisis. The Bangladeshi crew had to wait until 23 October to be repatriated, after receiving USD23,800, and until December for the outstanding USD10,000 to be paid. The ship was then released. ■

Trust gives £1.5m for seafarer welfare in Covid-19 emergency

The ITF Seafarers' Trust set up an emergency Covid-19 Fund to benefit seafarers and maintain their welfare services during the crisis. Katie Higginbottom, head of the Trust, reports on the difference the £1.5 million made



We set up the fund at the end of March 2020 to enable us to give grants to quickly meet emergency needs arising from the pandemic. The money was used to alleviate the hardship, stress and isolation endured by seafarers and their families, and to maintain seafarers' welfare services at this critical time.

By the end of November, we had given 61 grants in 34 countries, mainly to trade unions and port-based welfare providers. Most grants were given to projects in:

- Europe (16 projects totalling nearly £364,000) and North America (12 projects totalling nearly £203,000), where most seafarers' centres are
- Asia (11 projects totalling just over £308,000), to labour supply unions and organisations looking after stranded seafarers

Here is just a snapshot of how our grants helped seafarers.

Many unions were able to **provide personal protective equipment (PPE)** to seafarers in ports and in quarantine on board ships.

Some grants were made to **improve port**

sanitary facilities. The Maritime Workers' Union of Nigeria (MWUN) distributed thousands of sets of PPE and an education programme on how to prevent infection from the virus to all 12 ports and terminals in the country.

Several **seafarer centres were able to keep operating.** The TIPLAM centre in Santos, Brazil was able to buy a new vehicle and recruit an extra member of staff so that it could stay open throughout lockdown.

We funded a new molecular laboratory at AMOSUP's Seamen's Hospital in Intramuros, Manila, Philippines which processes 300 **Covid-19 tests** a day and gives the results within 24 hours. This allows **seafarers to take up contracts** aboard ship. When the need for Covid-19 testing decreases, the laboratory will test seafarers for viruses including flu, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), tuberculosis and HIV.

The Iranian Merchant Mariners' Syndicate (IMMS) received a grant to support the work of its COVID-19 committee. This included an **awareness-raising campaign 'We defeat Coronavirus'** to keep seafarers and their

families safe, a **volunteer system** to render medical care and distribute PPE and a **24/7 counselling helpline** to support stranded seafarers. It also collaborated with other maritime organisations in Italy and Spain to support non-domiciled or foreign seafarers, and worked with the Indian Embassy in Tehran to repatriate stranded seafarers.

The Sindicato Nacional De Trabajadores De Rama (SNTT) in Colombia was able to **deliver food baskets and PPE** to some 510 fishers and seafarers living and working in Valle del Cauca, one of the country's most affected areas. It also gave them **basic biosafety kits and protective suits** so that they could return to work safely when quarantine was lifted.

We felt hugely privileged to support the heroic trade unionists, welfare workers and volunteers providing services and equipment to the many seafarers and maritime workers who have had a really difficult time working throughout the pandemic. Where governments failed to cooperate promptly and facilitate crew changes, unions and welfare communities did their utmost to rise to the occasion. ■

The Seafarers' Trust is the charitable arm of the ITF – find out more at www.seafarerstrust.org



'Hero at sea' wins hugely popular photo competition

At the end of October 2020, the ITF Seafarers' Trust announced the winners of its Still at Sea photography competition. Head of the trust Katie Higginbottom was blown away by the power of the entries

When we invited seafarers to submit digital photographs of their lives at sea during the pandemic, not in my wildest dreams did I imagine that the competition would bring in a staggering 3,000 images.

The competition was conceived to connect with seafarers who had to stay at sea well beyond their contracts and, arguably, in contravention of their human rights, during the crew change crisis.

The powerful entries showed the huge variety of seafarers' experiences, making it very hard to choose the winners.

The first prize of £1,000 was won by Ike S Dagandanan for 'Hero At Sea', showing crew members wrestling to secure cargo in stormy seas after 40 days in lockdown. The judges singled it out as showing the dangers seafarers face, the dramatic weather and the sheer scale of the ship and seas around the seafarers.

Jay Michael A Ebueza's 'Secretly Quiet' won second prize for its beauty and composition of the Arctic coastal landscape as seen from the bridge of a ship, and its message of hope and resilience.

Third prize was awarded to Carlo Deuxson Santiago for his image 'No sign off? No problem' of a seafarer 'flying away' on a broomstick. Like many entries, this dealt humorously and imaginatively with a frustrating situation.

The judges highly commended three other photographs – Ceo Angelo D Fajardo's 'Back

to Work'; John Rufo M Bontilao's 'Shower Party'; and Mayvine Cloma's 'A Brave Woman that can make a difference'.

See the winners and the highly commended images at www.itfseafarers.org/en/still-at-sea/winners

These images and the accompanying stories and descriptions provide a unique archive that reflects the breadth of seafarers' experiences during the pandemic. We intend to use them to raise awareness of the lives of seafarers to the world outside maritime.

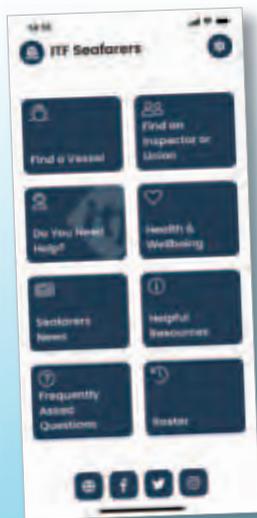
The judges of Still At Sea were:
President of the World Maritime University, Dr Cleopatra Doumbia-Henry; Jenn-Hui Tan, Global Head of Stewardship at Fidelity International; award-winning photographer Rory Carnegie; photographer and author Stefan F Lindberg; and Katie Higginbottom.



Seafarers – make the ITF your daily port of call for information and advice

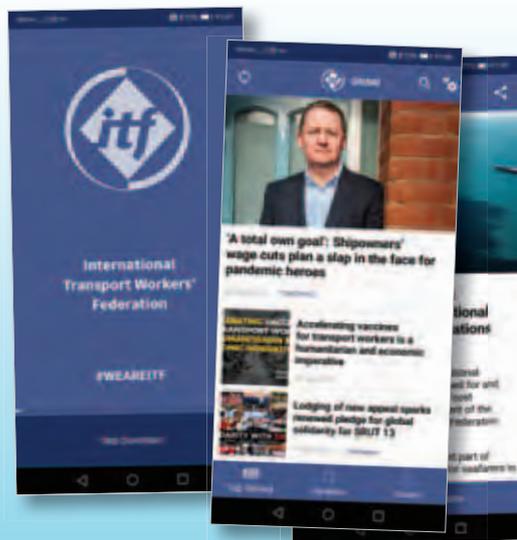
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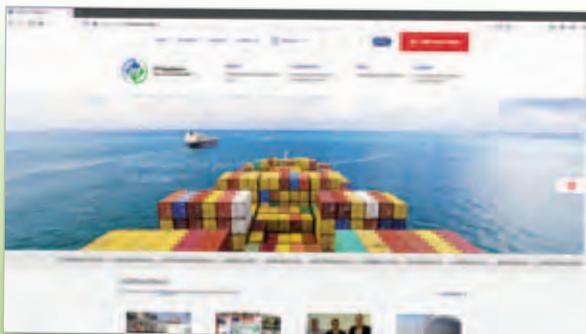
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- Discover where to get help in a crisis
- Get in touch with the ITF
- Find an ITF inspector or ITF maritime union



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www.itfseafarers.org

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