

Dockers and seafarers working together

Seafarers and dockers have always worked together to improve conditions onboard ships and in the docks they visit.

“Dockers are helping seafarers in getting their basic needs. Workers downed tools to support seafarers on the Panama-flag, Turkish-owned Belde after we found that crew members were working excessive hours for wages far below the international standards. All the 19 crew members on the vessel will now have enhanced wages and other social protection.” Manohar Bellani, Transport and Dockworkers’ Union of Kanda

“I led a team that visited the Princess Anastasia, travelling between St Petersburg, Tallinn and Stockholm. We spoke with crew members and

described what the union did and invited them to join. We explained what a collective bargaining agreement was and gave out copies of the signed agreement.” Evelin Tomson, Estonian Seamen’s Independent Union.

Dockers and seafarers work so closely with each other that sometimes seafarers are doing dockers’ work. Acting in solidarity with each other helps them to keep their jobs and pay separate – as well as helping them to better protect their rights.

As well as the FOC campaign, the ITF has a parallel campaign focused specifically on establishing minimum standards of workers’ rights and health and safety in all ports. The work of both the FOC and ports of convenience (POC) campaigns strengthen and underline the existing solidarity between seafarers and dockers.

Find out more about the ITF FOC campaign:

<http://www.itfglobal.org/flags-convenience/index.cfm>

Find out more about the ITF POC campaign:

<http://www.itfglobal.org/dockers/POC.cfm>

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Improving conditions for seafarers – the ITF FOC campaign



International Transport Workers’ Federation

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The International Transport Workers' Federation is a global union body representing millions of transport workers worldwide. The ITF is best known for its groundbreaking work to eliminate the exploitation of seafarers and for its flag of convenience (FOC) campaign.

The FOC campaign targets shipowners who use flags of convenience to avoid national legislation and to squeeze costs by keeping seafarers' wages unacceptably low and living and working conditions poor.

What is a flag of convenience?

If a ship is owned by a company operating out of one country, but is registered in another, then that ship flies a flag of convenience (FOC). For example, if an Australian company owns a ship, but it is registered in Panama – then that ship flies an FOC. Seventy per cent (by tonnage) of the world's shipping fleet is registered under flag of convenience – or is "flagged out".

FOCs are attractive to ship owners who want the cheapest and least regulated way of operating their vessel. Shipowners register

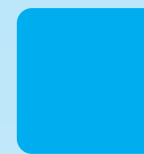
their vessels in FOC states as a cost-cutting exercise. FOC registers generally have lower registration fees and lower taxes than national shipping registers.

What's the impact on seafarers?

Registering a ship outside its country of ownership means that shipowners do not have to abide by national laws governing wages, working conditions or workers' rights.

Not all FOC shipowners are bad employers – many have agreements with ITF unions – but the FOC system itself is a big loophole that harbours exploitation. Seafarers are not protected by standard labour legislation – either in their home country or in the country of the employer. At work, they have limited access to union or legal representation or to other support services. When health, safety, living or working conditions are compromised, there is little they can do.

This is why ITF maritime unions believe that there must be a genuine link between the company that owns a ship and the flag it is registered under. Where flags of convenience are used that's not the case.



ITF FOC campaign aims

- To protect seafarers' working conditions
- To defend and promote the need for a genuine link between owner and flag
- To target an unfair system where the balance of power is unequal, and which facilitates exploitation by allowing shipowners to pay and treat seafarers as they deem fit

The FOC campaign in practice

ITF maritime unions, involving seafarers and dockers, are redressing this imbalance of power. Significantly, over the last 60 years, the ITF's work through the FOC campaign has improved conditions overall for seafarers. This has happened via ITF-approved agreements, a unique set of international minima for wages and conditions. ITF seafarer unions bargain

with global shipowners' bodies and negotiate with the owners of FOC vessels to conclude such ITF-approved agreements for seafarers.

ITF seafarer and docker unions support seafarers on FOC ships by:

- Participating in a network of inspectors to investigate suspect ships and win backpay for seafarers.
- Helping to win compensation if seafarers have suffered an injury on board.
- Participating in practical solidarity action around the FOC campaign.

ITF seafarer unions have successfully lobbied international organisations, including the International Labor Organization, for the establishment of a Maritime Labour Convention. They continue to press for a regulatory framework for the shipping industry – and towards the eventual elimination of the FOC system itself.



"We are out of food and our salaries have been delayed for three months. They want to send me home without salary and agreement."

"I am writing to you as I believe I was unfairly dismissed from work. My contract was cancelled without any possibility of defending myself."

"Can you please check the ship because I am just concerned about my friend who is working there. Here's an extract of a message I received: We crew were not given proper job descriptions and were given jobs outside our assigned work."

What seafarers' say...

List of FOC registries -

- Antigua and Barbuda
- Bahamas
- Barbados
- Belize
- Bermuda (UK)
- Bolivia
- Burma
- Cambodia
- Cayman Islands
- Comoros
- Curacao
- Cyprus
- Equatorial Guinea
- Faroe Islands (FAS)
- French International Ship Register (FIS)
- German International Ship Register (GIS)
- Georgia
- Gibraltar (UK)
- Honduras
- Jamaica
- Lebanon
- Liberia
- Malta
- Marshall Islands (USA)
- Mauritius
- Moldova
- Mongolia
- North Korea
- Panama
- Sao Tome and Principe

- St Vincent
- Sri Lanka
- Tonga
- Vanuatu

For an updated list of shipping registries that have been declared as FOC, visit the ITF website:

<http://www.itfseafarers.org/foc-registries.cfm>