

## **PANAMA ADVOCATES FOR SOLIDARITY BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS TO URGENTLY ADDRESS CREW CHANGES WHILE BENEFITING ALL SEAFARERS**

“Panama, as the first ship registry in the world with more than 8 thousand flagged vessels, feels the responsibility of representing the interests of the seafarers, as well as the shipowners and operators, who urgently need the help and solidarity of the rest of the world, for this reason we call on all governments to act urgently and responsibly, to allow crew changes, "said the Director General of Seafarers (DGGM) of the Panama Maritime Authority (AMP), Captain Juan Maltez during the meeting called "COVID-19 and changes in maritime crew: A humanitarian, safety and economic crisis".

This activity was carried out virtually as part of the celebration of the World Maritime Day, of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which on this occasion was coordinated with the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Global Compact, in collaboration with the International Chamber of Shipping and the International Federation of Transport Workers, during the high-level opening week of the 75th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly.

The Minister of Maritime Affairs, Arch. Noriel Araúz in the official act communicated that the main objective of participating was to share with the world the experiences acquired by the Republic of Panama during the last seven (7) months with respect to the crisis of crew changes, triggered by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

Panama is aware of the great value that seafarers represent and of the commendable mission they play for the entire world by keeping the supply chain active, which is why, since the beginning of this health crisis, we issued the Merchant Marine Notice 003, with the purpose of temporarily regulating the extension of labor agreements for crews in the face of global lockdowns, which forced seafarers to stay on board for longer than stipulated and not be able to disembark, these extensions came to an end on September 14, 2020.

Among the various actions taken by the AMP in favor of seafarers, the following stand out:

- Extend the validity of medical and training certificates and licenses for national and foreign seafarers on board Panamanian ships.
- Support IMO's decision to designate seafarers as "Key Workers", effective 17 May 2020.
- Protocols called "Diagram of the modalities for repatriation, disembarkation and boarding of crew members" were drawn up, which through seven (7) different modalities guarantee safe crew changes, following the guidelines of IMO Circular Letter 4204 / add14 issued by IMO.
- On September 8, we officially endorsed IMO Circular Letter No. 4204 / add 29, which contemplates three (3) main points: Designate all seafarers and maritime personnel (not only nationals) within their jurisdiction as key workers providing an essential service; implement the protocols and guidelines of the series of circular letters N ° 4204 and allow safe and secure crew changes; eliminate other barriers to crew changes such as visa restrictions, flight restrictions, national travel and movement restrictions, access to medical care and exams, etc.

Our nation, through the implementation of these Protocols, has facilitated crew changes and repatriations, benefiting to date some 8,268 people, including passengers and crew, of more than 50 different nationalities, covering all types of ships and yachts, also in the same period of time 1,787 seafarers have embarked.

We show our solidarity by providing timely humanitarian assistance to the "Zaandam" and "Rotterdam" cruises, by transferring their passengers and crew, they were also provided with supplies, medicines, medical equipment and their transit through the Panama Canal was coordinated, avoiding a greater tragedy.

We recognize that several countries support crew changes, but this is not enough. It is time for us to act together urgently and responsibly to allow crew changes, if there are no crew changes, shipping stops and the consequences will no longer be only for seafarers, but also for the rest of the world and its economy.

Seafarers need to return to their country of origin and those trapped on land must embark, so that goods and all trade can take place safely, this can be achieved through the protocols issued by the IMO, and Panama is an undeniable sample of it.

In this meeting, in addition to Minister Araúz and Director Maltez, participated: the Minister of Transport of Canada, Marc Garneau, the Minister of Transport of Kenya, James Macharia, the Secretary of Transport of the Philippines, Arthur Tugade and the Minister of the Sea of France, Annick Girardin while UN Global Compact Special Advisor on Oceans, Sturla Henriksen served as moderator.

The global maritime slogan for 2020 is "Sustainable maritime transport for a sustainable planet", providing the opportunity for the entire maritime community to strengthen its commitment and demonstrate the various actions carried out by IMO and its Member States to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (ODS) of the United Nations, which this September 25 will celebrate five (5) years since its proclamation.

World Maritime Day was established by the IMO Governing Council at its thirty-eighth session, in 1978. Each year, through a different slogans, it provides an opportunity to focus attention on the importance of global shipping or other aspects that the organization wishes to highlight. This year it is being carried out for the first time in a virtual way due to the pandemic produced by the coronavirus (COVID-19).