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WORLD MARITIME DAY 2016 SHIPPING: INDISPENSABLE TO THE WORLD

A message from Kitack Lim Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization

In a world where the global population has topped 7 billion and is set to double in many developing countries by 2050, the challenges we face are almost unprecedented.

Threats of conflict, terrorism, mass mixed migration, food and water insecurity, climate change and the widening division between the "haves" and the "have-nots" loom large.

Governments and civil society are seeking ways in which social and economic development can continue to satisfy the needs of this burgeoning population, but in a way that is genuinely sustainable.

Last year saw two landmark achievements: the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change. As United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said when he visited IMO in February this year, "These are victories for the world's people, and triumphs for multilateralism."

Shipping, and IMO, have a major role to play in translating the momentum generated by these agreements into tangible improvements in the lives of the people we serve.

In today's economy, people all over the world rely on ships to transport the commodities, fuel, foodstuffs, goods and products on which they depend. Maritime transport is the backbone of international trade and global markets.

Ships have never been so technically advanced, so sophisticated, never carried so much cargo, never been safer and never been so environment-friendly as they are today. It is thanks to this global fleet and global workforce of over one million seafarers that the import and export of goods on the scale necessary to sustain the modern world can take place.

But, if the benefits of globalization are to be evenly spread, all countries must be able to play a full and active part in shipping.

Sustainable economic growth, employment, prosperity and stability can all be enhanced through developing maritime trade, improving port infrastructure and efficiency, and promoting seafaring as a career – especially within the developing world. IMO's work makes a strong contribution in all of these areas.

Seaborne trade brings benefits to us all through competitive freight costs. The transport cost element in the shelf price of consumer goods is negligible for a product transported by sea. With its impressive environmental performance, shipping is also a driver of "green growth".

Sustainable development is dependent on the continuing cost-efficiency of maritime transport. Economic and regulatory incentives will encourage the shipping industry to invest in green technologies, which are not only beneficial for the environment, but can also mean cost savings in the longer term.

The availability of low-cost and efficient maritime transport has helped make possible the dramatic improvements in global living standards, especially in emerging economies, that have seen many people taken out of acute poverty in recent years.

As the World Maritime Day theme for 2016 so rightly acknowledges, shipping is indispensable to the world – and is set to remain central to world economic growth as we make the inevitable transition towards an era of clean and sustainable development.

This is a message that needs, and deserves, a wider audience. Almost everyone in the world today relies on shipping to some extent – but very few are aware of it. I will certainly be doing my best to amplify this message during the course of the year and I urge all those involved in this vital industry to join me in spreading the news that shipping is indispensable to the world.
