

UNICPOLOS – Abstract

Segment 4 - Panel Discussion - Focus on people at sea

Presentation by Jon Whitlow,
Secretary of the Seafarers', Fisheries and Inland Navigation Sections,
International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)

Merchant shipping is the motor of the global economy and carries 90% of world trade. Ships need seafarers and there is a growing shortage of suitably trained seafarers. It is becoming harder to recruit new entrants and to retain seafarers in sea going positions. Seafarers live and work on the ships on which they serve and can easily become socially isolated. For long periods of time the people who work a sea are out of sight and out of mind. It has also been recognised that shore leave is a vital element of seafarers general well-being and, therefore, to the realisation of decent work for seafarers. Seafarers generally have to travel to and from the vessel through the territory of the State in which the vessels berths. Seafarers are recognised as a special category of worker and, given the global nature of the shipping industry and the different jurisdictions that they may be brought into contact with, need special protection, especially in relation to contacts with public authorities.

UNCLOS establishes that the flag State shall effectively exercise its jurisdiction and control in administrative, technical and social matters over ships flying their flag. Inadequate flag State control impacts directly on seafarers and fishers in terms of their safety, their living and working conditions and in the ability to exercise their human rights. Seafarers and fishers look to the flag State to support them when something goes wrong.

A lot is said about the "human element" but all too often the impact of new regulations on the people who work at sea is not fully taken into account.

The ILO has designated fishing as an especially hazardous sector and the applicable international safety conventions have not entered into force.

The presentation will seek to focus on people at sea and provide an overview of the current challenges which face seafarers and fishers.

Seafarers

- Economic, security related and regulatory pressures have dramatically altered the seafarers' lifestyle;
- They no longer have a chance to see the world and some consider that the ship is now more like a prison sentence;
- The pressures on manning have resulted in reduced numbers, increased stress, higher levels of fatigue and a greater potential for accidents;
- The risk of criminalisation in the event of an accident or when there is pollution;
- The denial of shore-leave, new visa requirements and discrimination for certain nationalities;
- A lack of effective oversight, continuing abuses and abandonment - sub-standard shipping; and
- Inadequate flag State control, especially over social and labour aspects.

Fishers

- Key international safety conventions not in force;
- High accident rate;
- Inadequate flag State control, especially over social and labour aspects; and
- Fuel costs and IUU.