

PRESS RELEASE – DAY OF THE SEAFARER 25th JUNE, 2020

Moves by the New Zealand Government to deny seafarers access to shore leave breaches international treaties, increases risk of death and could cripple the economy.

On Monday the New Zealand Government announced that crews on foreign ships will be required to enter managed isolation if on shore-leave, unless they had been on the ship for a continuous 28 days without showing symptoms. The 28-day rule doubles the earlier requirement that those working on ships must have been onboard for 14 days or longer with no health problems apparent.

These restrictions, which do not apply to airline crews, are in direct violation of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), 2006 signed into law by the New Zealand Government. The MLC guarantees seafarers access to shore-based welfare, and much needed respite from long months at sea.

Most ships visiting New Zealand do not have WIFI on board, and so for the majority of seafarers visiting our ports the only access they have to communication with home is through WIFI provided by welfare centres run by The Mission to Seafarers, Stella Maris and the Sailor's Society – all through charitable donations.

Life at sea is difficult at the best of times. In recent years numerous international studies have highlighted the rapid rise of mental health concerns amongst seafarers, and the growing numbers of seafarers who are taking their own lives through suicide.¹

The issues that seafarers have identified as key contributors to the increased levels of mental health distress include isolation, lengthy separation from their families, lack of access to WIFI, limited shore leave and lack of access to mental health support and shore-based counselling and advocacy supports. However, due to restrictions put in place following the COVID-19 pandemic, seafarers lives are being further impacted due to increased restrictions and cases of crew fatigue and suicides have risen significantly.

¹ <https://iosh.com/media/6306/seafarers-mental-health-wellbeing-full-report.pdf>,
https://www.seafarerstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/ST_MentalHealthReport_Final_Digital-1.pdf,
https://safety4sea.com/cm-world-mental-health-day-suicide-of-seafarers-in-the-spotlight/?_cf_chl_jschl_tk=__8ea430a9deffdae8c9509c63ec5847f8440e6f85-1592943052-0-ARokG-GfYCYQ0sZa96ZIEa39GQvrW06S59HILpuj2gRczYpiQdoyylccsU5Bv2InA5oNVEUS1sg2q893Gw_nQeY6H2KtE-1bC6zq5LnjIVb2vOERxC3dMiUUay5OG2ddkZI2V3Bqi-vPrk5HKbnUDCYyU4Le34wPdJThhpoYa8Pv2oluAfNscbYddgAlvjB-8_dIQ0jG9bLuoRa5N88t7QQ-UIVsZ8Rm0DJacoX1NY7OjsG9BqmocT2Y4HSWUfdu3O5qL1iwVrkBMunLuOifubd3GwtUu_oyxlQzP3zsdCJBs3DAYQuajE9wqidw1d5Q9iA7aK19hMC3EVK40CfOP7wxaAgY4-Ex6-uUW4dK4VZ

New Zealand relies heavily on the sea, and seafarers ensure the economy keeps moving. Over 90% of every item consumed in New Zealand arrives on ships, and nearly 90% of all exports leave our shores by sea.

While life at sea is difficult in the best of times, the global pandemic has only increased the difficult working conditions for seafarers, including uncertainties and difficulties about port access, re-supply, crew changeovers and repatriation. Globally over 40,000 cruise ship crew remain stranded on-board ships, and crew changes (which occur at the end of a seafarers contract) cannot occur in most jurisdictions. Many crew visiting New Zealand are already months beyond the end of their contracts but have no ability to return home.

Earlier this month the International Maritime Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) has taken the unprecedented step of telling the world's seafarers to stop working if their employment contracts have expired and they are awaiting repatriation home.² If this occurs global trade could grind to a stand-still seriously impacting the New Zealand economy and crippling exports and imports.

Reverend John McLister, Port Chaplain for Lyttleton and the Chair of the Seafarers Welfare Board for New Zealand has spoken to numerous crew who have already been onboard ships for over twelve months, three-to-four months beyond the expiry of their contracts. Ships visiting Wellington, Tauranga and Auckland are similarly impacted.

Reverend Lance Lukin, the Mission to Seafarer Chaplain in Wellington said "being unable to get home has a negative impact on seafarers, and not having an end date in sight for their contract adds to the stress. However, what makes matters worse is that they are denied access to shore leave, and on most ports, they have no access to WIFI other than what we take on board for them".

"Most just want to be able to talk to their families back at home" says Reverend Lukin in Wellington, "and unless we deliver the WIFI units and raise the funds to pay for them, then this simply won't happen, and this increases stress and fatigue". Crew fatigue was identified as one of the contributing factors in the grounding of MV Rena on the Astrolabe Reef, near Tauranga in 2011. "The potential for more accidents like this one is very real", says Reverend Lukin.

The Mission to Seafarers, along with the Seafarers Welfare Board, who works to provide welfare support to all seafarers, calls on the New Zealand Government to urgently support the vital work that they are doing to care for the needs of the seafarers visiting our ports. This includes providing immediate funding for the provision of WIFI, mental health support and contactless delivery of essential personal items such as toiletries.

If immediate funding is not made available to enable the provision of WIFI and the basic needs of seafarers, and if shore leave continues to be denied then the New Zealand

² <https://gcaptain.com/itf-tells-seafarers-to-stop-work-as-crew-change-deadline-passes/>

Government risks being directly responsible for increased suicides at sea, accidents similar to the Rena disaster, or a total collapse of maritime trade and the New Zealand economy,

CONTACT:

Reverend Lance Lukin

Mission to Seafarers Regional Director for Oceania, and Chaplain to Wellington

022 620 2440