



The Marshall Islands Registry

Republic of the Marshall Islands Urges Countries to Treat Seafarers as Key Transport Workers

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For Immediate Release

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), one of the world's largest maritime registries, with more than 4,700 vessels and nearly 100,000 seafarers serving on RMI-flagged vessels encourages countries to recognize and protect seafarers as key transport workers amid restrictions around the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic. During times of crisis, seafarers play an essential role in moving not only food and household goods, but also fuel, medicine, equipment, and critical supplies to places in need.

While there are lists of precautions to be taken to avoid catching COVID-19 and consideration for those suffering its effects or in quarantine, there is little attention paid to the seafarers who keep global shipping moving.

Many countries have imposed travel bans and restrictions on crew changes in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19. The unforeseen consequence of these travel bans is the prevention of the change of ships' crews; either to join a ship or for crews to be relieved and return home to their families. The RMI Registry has received a number of complaints from operators and individual seafarers stating that the prevention of repatriation is adding to their emotional stress and adversely affecting their well-being. Seafarers typically spend many months away from their families. Due to this pandemic, family reunions have been even further delayed.

While the maritime industry, by necessity, has been forced to accept the extension of seafarer employment agreements and contracts, such measures may affect the fair treatment and rights of seafarers, as well as potentially disrupt commerce. The technical complexity of ships and the hazardous environments they operate in require the professionalism of officers and crew to ensure the safety of the vessel, its cargo, and the seafarers on board. Extended service on board, coupled with the stress about COVID-19 and its effects on them and their families at home, may result in safety being compromised on board. The ability to plan and carry out a crew change is essential to maintain the continuity of shipping and the supply of essentials. The health and safety of seafarers must remain a top priority.

On behalf of all seafarers serving the international community, the RMI Registry urges governments to recognize the contribution of seafarers towards keeping vital supply chains open, and to devise plans to allow them to board a designated ship and to be repatriated at the end of their contracts.

To this end, the RMI Registry fully endorses Circular Letter No. 4224, issued by the Secretary General of the International Maritime Organization, as well as the stance taken by the Government of the United Kingdom designating seafarers as key transport workers. The RMI Registry remains ready to engage in an active dialogue with all stakeholders to relieve the plight of the seafarer during this pandemic.