Ladies and gentlemen,

We are coming to the end of this session, an open dialogue with United Nations, Member Governments and shipping industry organizations.

This session has been very informative and I have learned a lot, so I hope that everybody has appreciated the information provided. Thank you for that.

I recall that I first spoke out on this matter in October 2013 at Maritime Cyprus, immediately after the Lampedusa tragedy.

I mentioned then that we should put more efforts to prevent unsafe, illegal, sea passages. I monitored this situation throughout last year and in September I attended the European Coast Guard Functions Forum in Civitavecchia, Italy, organized by the Italian authorities. At that time I called for concerted action by the international community to tackle the problems related to the large number of migrants on board unseaworthy boats drifting for rescue in the Mediterranean.

Later, in December 2014, after I raised the matter to the Chief Executives Board (CEB) of the United Nations System, I was invited to the UNHCR Dialogue on Protection at Sea. I appreciated very much the opportunity to speak there and I declared that I would host an inter-agency meeting to discuss the matter at IMO Headquarters.

Since then we have met twice in two preparatory meetings in Geneva and I would like to thank very much the support from UN colleague agencies. After those two sessions of intensive discussions, we organized the inter-agency meeting which we have been holding yesterday and today. I would like to personally thank Mr. Irfan Rahim, as he has been instrumental in dealing with this matter and I very much appreciate his efforts.

The current situation we are facing is, in my view, a real challenge for the shipping industry.

As ICS Secretary-General Peter Hinchliffe indicated yesterday, if projected with the same pace of growth as last year, then this year, 2015, we may encounter 400,000 to 450,000 people to be rescued at sea.

The fact is, the Mare Nostrum operation was terminated and the rescue coordination facilities of the Italian navy and coastguard off the coast of Northern Africa and Eastern Mediterranean have been largely withdrawn.

That created, in my view, a vacuum in the rescue coordination function. This has been filled in some part by merchant ships, which last year rescued, as far as I understand, 40,000 people among more than 200,000 rescued. If we continue to follow the same pattern of growth this year, in 2015, of the large number of people coming from land on unseaworthy
boats, we may see a rescue of people by merchant vessels, with ten times more than in 2014. So, according to my calculation, we may see, every day, six merchant vessels being called upon to act with each rescuing some 200 migrants. I think we are just beginning to feel the potential magnitude and scale of these huge challenges the shipping industry is currently facing. At this meeting, UN agencies have agreed to establish a new mechanism, particularly focusing on the sea phase of maritime migration. We have held a dialogue yesterday and today. But in my view this is just the beginning of our efforts.

What is important, in my view, is not a meeting, not a dialogue and not a mechanism of the United Nations, but the political and collective will of Governments and the international community, supported by the United Nations and Industry, to take action.

The Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia that was formed in the beginning of 2009 generated the interest of Governments and maintained the willingness and determination of international community to take action against Somali piracy.

In order to take effective concerted action to the problem at hand in the Mediterranean, we also need a forum of Governments, UN agencies and industry.

I hope that IMO can provide such an opportunity and perform such a function as the forum to facilitate forming concerted efforts of the international community, in particular for the maritime phase of the problem we are facing in the Mediterranean. I do not think we need another Contact Group because IMO can do the exact function of that group for the Mediterranean issues, together with Member Governments.

The agreement among UN agencies is really just the first step, and in my view, this is a small but important step forward.

I hope that this mechanism will cover all aspects of migration at sea, covering of course from the beginning, human rights; and there is already a support system for refugees in the UN system. But, more importantly, all issues regarding sea migration, from prevention of unsafe, illegal sea passages; thinking about alternative safe ways for people to migrate; and also about how to strengthen the rescue operations by coast guards, navies and international shipping.

I hope that we will meet regularly, I hope we monitor the situation closely and I hope we can take timely action.

With regard to short-term objectives within the field of inter-agency activity, I would like to take action now to start creating, first of all, a migrants/smugglers database, together with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), thanks to the strong support indicated by its Executive Director, Mr. Yury Fedotov, and also working with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Secondly, I would like to create an information sharing and communication system for sea migration incidents in the Mediterranean.

And in addition, I hope we can discuss how we can create some kind of campaign material for migrants, in order to raise awareness of the danger and the inherent risk of unseaworthy sea crossings arranged by migrant smugglers.

I would like to discuss details of our activities with our colleagues in the other United Nations agencies.
Finally, in terms of what IMO can do, I intend first of all to brief delegates to the Sub-Committee on Navigation, Communication and Search and Rescue (NCSR) which meets next week. More importantly, I would like to inform in depth about the extent of your discussions first to the Legal Committee, which meets in April, secondly to the Maritime Safety Committee, which meets in June, and then to the IMO Council in June/July, on the outcome of the Inter-Agency Meeting and dialogue we had yesterday and today.

Hopefully, we may generate interest among IMO Member Governments in taking action in dealing with the challenges we are facing in the Mediterranean.

This is my intention and hopefully we can discuss the issues through the usual ordinary mechanism of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and specifically any issue which comes under the remit and responsibility of IMO.

So that comes to the end of my closing remarks, leaving me time to express my sincere appreciation to everybody who attended and supported this meeting. First of all UN agencies, colleagues, thank you very much for your support. It has been a learning process and very informative, thank you. Without your efforts I could not have managed to organize this meeting. And I would like to ask you to express my sincere appreciation to your respective heads of UN agencies; thank you very much.

And also not least member Governments and international non-governmental organizations, particularly the shipping industry, thank you very much for your constructive approach towards this meeting. I think we need to really talk more and more, as without your cooperation we cannot make any progress.

And really finally, I thank you IMO Secretariat. I mentioned Irfan already but I would also like to thank Andy Winbow, Fred Kenney and Chris Trelawny, and also our social media team. I think our meeting was widely covered. Thank you very much and I really appreciate all of your efforts to support this meeting. Thank you very much.