Dear Participants, Dear Secretary-General, distinguished colleagues,

In my capacity as Chair of the IMO Facilitation committee, I would like to welcome you all at this special event on ports organized by the International Maritime Organization.

The event aims at maintaining the focus of the 2017 World Maritime Day theme "Connecting Ships, Ports and People". As the global shipping industry serves the whole community, indeed the link between ship, port and finally the people that either work on board or on shore, represents a key element and lifeblood of the global sea trade.

In this respect the work of IMO in the field of facilitation of international shipping, which might not be seen as a headline, nevertheless forms a very important and integral part of the overall scope of the IMO work.

Needless to say, that the Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic, adopted in 1965, at the moment is one of the oldest IMO instrument in force.

The international nature of shipping obviously dictated the need to have a global instrument to provide an interlink between various elements - customs, immigration, cargo and passengers clearance, ship and port operations. As the situation and practice was changing, the IMO responded by amending the standards and recommended practices of the FAL Convention. Since 1965 it was done 14 times including the most recent amendments adopted in 2016, which recently came into force. The FAL Convention remains to be a flexible instrument to give Administrations freedom to choose mechanisms for implementation of relevant standards in their national legislation.

I note with satisfaction that one of the sessions of today's event will be dedicated to the electronic exchange of information and single window.
During recent 5 years the Facilitation Committee has been working hard to facilitate and support the essential trend of digitalization in the field of maritime transport. The primary concern has been the need to adapt the regulatory environment to the wider use by Governments of various digital solutions for optimization and improvement of statutory certification process. As a result, the first interim guidelines for use of printed versions of electronic certificates were produced in 2013, followed by two consecutive amendments. The document now reads as "Guidelines for use of electronic certificates". This is a comprehensive set of recommendations to the Administrations aimed at encouraging them to use and accept electronic statutory certificates.

In addition to that, in 2016 Facilitation Committee adopted amendments to the FAL Convention which imply the need for Governments to take measures for the establishment of systems for the electronic exchange of information. Such measures shall be implemented on national level not later than 8 April 2019 with one transitional year afterwards.

I know that in some ports similar systems have already been working for quite a long time. And it is obvious that the expansion of electronic solutions in this sphere throughout the world would serve as a solid ground for raising the effectiveness of global maritime trade, as a truly connecting ambient for ships, ports and people involved.

One of the recommended practices inserted in the FAL Convention as part of 2016 amendments relates to the introduction of a "single window" concept. The concept provides that all information related to arrival, stay and departure of a ship, persons and cargo on board should be communicated to the public authorities using s single channel arrangements.
The FAL Committee in 2011 developed guidelines for setting up a single window system in maritime transport, which were recently revised and the new revision of the guidelines was thoroughly discussed during last week at the 42nd session of the FAL Committee. The Guidelines clarify the concept of single window; define the main technicalities and procedural features to help Governments to successfully introduce such arrangements.

At this stage, I believe, it is very important to bring together all relevant key players that are involved in port operations, to get their feedback and experience straight from their hands, which this event under the auspices of IMO suits perfectly well.

I wish you all a fruitful discussion and I am convinced that this event would substantially contribute to the future work of the FAL Committee aimed at further facilitation of international trade and thus - at our common advancement ahead.