Launch of the Action Plan to promote the 2011 World Maritime Day theme
“Piracy: orchestrating the response”
IMO Headquarters
Thursday, 3 February 2011

Speeches by:

Mr. Efthimios E. Mitropoulos, Secretary-General, IMO
Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General, United Nations
Ms Josette Sheeran, Executive Director, World Food Programme (WFP)
Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
Mr. Robert Lorenz-Meyer, President, BIMCO
Mr. David Cockroft, General Secretary, International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF)
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Secretary-General, International Maritime Organization

Secretary-General, Excellencies, Executive Heads of WFP and UNODC, President of the IMO Assembly, Commissioner, Admirals, Secretary-General Emeritus, heads and representatives of international shipping organizations, media representatives, my Lords, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to IMO.

In the past 12 months alone, there have been 286 piracy-related incidents off the coast of Somalia. They have resulted in 67 hijacked ships, with 1130 seafarers on board – whilst, at present, 714 seafarers are being held for ransom on board 30 ships scattered at various points of the country’s extensive coastline.

Piracy and kidnapping have blighted the maritime community for too long and it is seafarers who bear the brunt. And while we condemn and deplore any act of piracy, as the Security Council has done in several resolutions, we were appalled by yesterday’s news that pirates had executed, apparently in cold blood, a seafarer on the “Beluga Nomination”, a ship which had been attacked and hijacked last month, 390 miles off the Seychelles. And so it was very much with seafarers in mind that, last year, the IMO Council decided that the 2011 World Maritime Day theme should be “Piracy: orchestrating the response”.

Today marks the formal launch of this theme, along with the action plan we have devised to help achieve the objectives we have set. And we are honoured that the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, has come to do just that. The fact that this is the second time in three years that the Secretary-General is visiting IMO is confirmation of his interest in maritime affairs and his concern over the unacceptable incidence of modern-day piracy – an unlawful act, which, further to the trauma it causes to seafarers and their families, is estimated, in accordance with a recent study reported by Chatham House, to cost the world economy between 7bn and 12bn US dollars per year, as a result of the disruption it effects on shipping services and international trade.

Also joining us today are Ms Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the World Food Programme; Mr. Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; Mr. Robert Lorenz-Meyer, President of BIMCO, representing the shipping industry; and Mr. David Cockroft, General Secretary of the International Transport Workers’ Federation, representing the seafarers.

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Since we first drew the attention of the Security Council to the problem of piracy off the coast of Somalia, in November 2005, the Secretary-General has been in the vanguard of efforts to increase awareness of the problem and the need to find a solution to it. So, sincere thanks are due to Mr. Ban for his personal commitment to the common cause and for the interest he has shown, and continues to show, on an issue of grave concern to the maritime community. This is manifested in many ways, not least through the inclusion of a section on piracy in his regular reports to the Security Council on Somalia; his leadership role in the formulation and adoption of several Security Council resolutions on piracy off the coast of Somalia; and his recent appointment of a Special Adviser on Legal Issues Related to Piracy off the Coast of Somalia. Thank you, Secretary-General.
I should also like to thank all the other panellists (especially, Ms Sheeran and Ambassador Fedotov) for coming here today (from Rome and Vienna, respectively). Their presence serves not only to reinforce our choice of theme for 2011 but also gives us hope that, with our collective strength and determination, we can achieve the objectives we have set and make some genuine inroads into what, to date, has been an escalating problem of global concern. Our thanks to them and the organizations they represent are profound.

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IMO has been dealing with piracy issues for the last thirty years. In the early 1980s, it was the Gulf of Guinea that first attracted our attention while, in the late 1990s and the early part of this century, the focus was on the then hot-spots of the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca and Singapore. Through a series of measures, developed and implemented by, and with the co-operation and support of, the littoral States, States using the Straits and the industry, we have been able to help significantly reduce piracy in those regions.

However, the problem has lately manifested itself in other parts of the world, most notably – but not exclusively – off the coast of Somalia, in the Gulf of Aden and the wider Indian Ocean. We believe that we can use the experience gained and the successes achieved in reducing piracy elsewhere to good effect in the current arena as well, but to do so requires a well orchestrated response.

We have, therefore, developed, in co-operation with the shipping industry, seafaring representative organizations and other stakeholders, an action plan to maintain and, indeed, strengthen our focus on anti-piracy endeavours of all kinds and to facilitate a broader, global effort. We have identified six prime objectives that we hope all stakeholders will espouse during 2011 and beyond, if necessary. They are:

one: to increase pressure at the political level to secure the release of all hostages being held by pirates;

two: to review and improve the IMO guidelines to Administrations and seafarers and promote compliance with industry best management practices and the recommended preventive, evasive and defensive measures ships should follow;

three: to promote greater levels of support from, and coordination with, navies;

four: to promote anti-piracy coordination and co-operation procedures between and among States, regions, organizations and industry;

five: to assist States to build capacity in piracy-infested regions of the world, and elsewhere, to deter, interdict and bring to justice those who commit acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships; and

six: to provide care, during the post traumatic period, for those attacked or hijacked by pirates and for their families.

Let me put some flesh on these bones. Underlying our efforts to achieve these objectives will be the need to engage at the political level to bring about a solution to the Somali problem and thus facilitate and expedite the release of seafarers and any other persons held hostage by pirates. While the process to solve Somalia’s political problem and create conditions of stability in the country may be long and the solution may not be around the corner, this is a matter for the United Nations to pursue and neither IMO nor the maritime community have any substantive role to play in it. Calling, however, the world’s attention to the unacceptable plight of the
innocent victims of pirates can help to create the momentum necessary for action to be taken to hasten their release.

In the meantime, there should be no respite in our efforts to strengthen the protection of persons, ships and cargoes in piracy-infested areas (at the same time preserving the integrity of shipping lanes of strategic importance and significance, such as the Gulf of Aden) through rigorous implementation of the International Safety Management Code and the International Ships and Port Facility Code; through improvements to, and wider promulgation of, the IMO and industry best management practice guidance; through advice to ships’ crews about how to access naval vessels deployed in the region and also how to best implement the preventive, evasive and defensive measures recommended by IMO and the industry; and through promoting even greater levels of coordination among navies, above and beyond the one that characterizes the co-operation among the naval vessels from so many countries that have assembled in the same region in a strong demonstration of solidarity for the same good cause. In achieving this, the United Nations could be instrumental and we turn to you, Secretary-General, for endorsement, leadership and guidance.

During 2011, we intend to promote further co-operation between and among States, regions and organizations to prevent and reduce attacks on ships through information-sharing; coordination of military and civil efforts; and the development and implementation of regional initiatives, such as the IMO-led Djibouti Code of Conduct.

We will also help infrastructure and capacity building in States lying in regions of the world affected by pirates to deter, interdict and bring to justice the perpetrators of such acts, thereby enhancing maritime law enforcement and the safety of life at sea. This will also help tackle the root causes of piracy, through the provision of assistance to States for the development of their maritime law enforcement capabilities and the protection of their marine resources.

Specifically, in the case of Somalia, we intend to contribute, in any way possible (including through the establishment of a coastal monitoring and law-enforcement force) to the creation of a state of stability at both sides of the Horn of Africa coastline that will, in due course, have a beneficial impact on the overall situation piracy-wise.

And we will work with Governments and the industry to ensure that released seafarers and their families receive care during the post-traumatic period.

There is already good progress on which to build. The establishment, within the context of a UN Security Council resolution, of the Contact Group on Piracy off the coast of Somalia has done much to promote our shared agenda for improved coordination amongst States, industry and organizations. And, through the Djibouti Code of Conduct, we are establishing information-sharing centres in Yemen, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania, as well as a regional training centre in Djibouti. In partnership with the UNODC, we are helping regional States to develop the legal framework necessary to prosecute pirates – an objective also pursued by the Contact Group. We will continue to give this initiative the highest priority with the aim of assisting States in the region to build and develop an adequate infrastructure, which, in turn, will enable them to conduct effective counter-piracy operations.

However, as the statistics so bleakly indicate, piracy and armed robbery against ships remain real and ever-present dangers to those who use the seas for peaceful purposes – and, as long as pirates continue harassing shipping; endangering the critical delivery of humanitarian aid carried by ships chartered by the World Food Programme; and hijacking ships and seafarers, we are neither proud of, nor content with, the results achieved so far. This year, we are resolved to redouble our efforts and, in so doing, generate and galvanize a broader, global response to modern-day piracy. More needs to be done, including the tracing of money and the imposition of sanctions on the proceeds derived from hijacked ships, if the ultimate goal of consigning
piracy to the realms of history is to be achieved. We hope that our choice of the theme for 2011 will provide an appropriate rallying point around which all those who can make a difference can focus their efforts. Your presence here this morning provides encouragement and support for what we are doing and what we intend to do – and I thank you for that.

In the meantime, our thoughts and prayers are with those seafarers, who, at present, are in the hands of pirates. May they all be released unharmed and returned to their families soon.

Thank you.

It is my great pleasure now to invite the Secretary-General to address us. He will be followed to the floor by Ms Josette Sheeran, Mr. Yury Fedotov, Mr. Robert Lorenz-Meyer and Mr. David Cockroft in that order.
Secretary-General Mitropoulos,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to help launch the World Maritime Day theme for 2011. I thank Secretary-General Mitropoulos for providing the opportunity and for his kind words of introduction.

Piracy is a global menace. Mr. Mitropoulos has just given us some startling statistics. We are all alarmed, as we should be.

Piracy seems to be outpacing the efforts of the international community to stem it.

Therefore I welcome the decision of the International Maritime Organization to pay special attention to piracy during the year ahead.

“Piracy: orchestrating the response” is a timely and important initiative. We need to assess what is working, what is missing, and what needs to be improved.

Although piracy manifests itself at sea, the roots of the problem are to be found ashore. This is a complex issue. But in essence, piracy is a criminal offence that is driven by economic hardship, and that flourishes in the absence of effective law enforcement.

The only truly successful way to address the problem in the long term is through a strategy that focuses on deterrence, security, the rule of law and development.

The situation off the coast of Somalia is foremost in our minds at the moment.

There are almost daily reports of attacks. As we gather here, 31 ships with more than 700 people are being held hostage.

Moreover, ransom payments adding up to hundreds of millions of dollars have created a “pirate economy” in some areas of Somalia that make them more resistant to efforts to develop alternative livelihoods.

Economies throughout East Africa and beyond are experiencing the fallout.

Goods in Somalia and the region are becoming more expensive owing to the increased cost of doing business and the price distortions generated by artificial economies.

And the pirates’ reach continues to expand. One vessel was recently hijacked near the Mozambique coast, and another approximately 120 nautical miles from Madagascar.

Insurance premiums are on the rise. The threat to international trade routes is clear.
The situation is completely unacceptable. Our common goal must be a sustainable solution.

The role of the IMO in securing and developing Somalia’s maritime sector, in cooperation with other relevant UN partners, could play an important part in alleviating the conditions that encourage people to turn to piracy.

Indeed, the IMO has a successful record in anti-piracy initiatives, building on its longstanding standard-setting work on maritime safety, borders and environmental protection.

The Straits of Singapore and Malacca were once of the world’s piracy hot-spots. Today, thanks to agreements fostered by the IMO, States in the region have developed effective frameworks for cooperation in policing the situation.

The IMO has been developing similar measures to address the escalating situation off the coast of Somalia since 2005. The Djibouti Code of Conduct, signed by seventeen States from the region, is the primary regional cooperation mechanism to address piracy and seeks to replicate in the Horn of Africa the collaboration that has proved so successful in South-East Asia.

Piracy and armed robbery at sea are not simple issues and, as such, require a coordinated response under the overarching legal framework provided by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It is also important to adopt a comprehensive approach, which takes into account political and socio-economic factors.

Many UN organs and bodies are engaged.

The Security Council has adopted resolutions on Somalia of ever-increasing severity and scope. The United Nations General Assembly has regularly addressed piracy in its annual resolutions on oceans and the law of the sea.

I note with appreciation the close cooperation of the IMO with the Department of Political Affairs, the UN Political Office in Somalia, the Office of Legal Affairs, the World Food Programme, the UN Development Programme and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. It is important that we continue to act as one. Interpol is another key partner.

I note the important role being played by the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia as a forum for international cooperation and information-sharing, with the active participation of the United Nations.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the Combined Maritime Taskforce 151, the European Union Naval Force, NATO, and all Member States’ navies and coast guards that patrol the Gulf of Aden and the waters off the coast of Somalia, pursuant to relevant Security Council resolutions. They are providing vital protection for United Nations vessels delivering logistical support to AMISOM – and for WFP shipments of humanitarian aid to the 2.4 million Somalis who urgently need it.

Yet despite the deployment of significant naval assets to the region, the number of hijackings and victims has risen significantly. More needs to be done.

We need to move beyond the impressive deterrence efforts, and to make sure that they are carried out in concert with the other elements of the strategy, on land.

We need to support alternative livelihoods and the rehabilitation of coastal fisheries.
We need to develop Somali capacity to deal with piracy-related activities on land and in its territorial sea. This must be linked to the broader efforts to develop Somalia’s police and coast guard, as well as its justice sector, to ensure that persons suspected of acts of piracy are prosecuted.

Though governance remains weak in Somalia, the Transitional Federal Government has a new Prime Minister, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed. He has produced a roadmap focusing on critical priorities: reconciliation, good governance, security, institutional capacity and the Constitution-making process.

Success in these initiatives can provide the necessary stability from which all the country’s problems – including piracy – can be addressed.

The Security Council, for its part, recently agreed to increase the size of the African Union peacekeeping mission from 8,000 to 12,000 personnel.

Last week, my Special Advisor on the legal aspects of piracy off the coast of Somalia, Mr. Jack Lang, briefed the Security Council, and made a number of recommendations. The Special Adviser’s report highlights the need for urgent action.

I would also like to stress the importance of the trust funds that have been established to finance anti-piracy measures, and take this opportunity to call for more contributions to them, including by the shipping community.

Finally, let us never forget the detrimental impact of piracy on the innocent seafarers themselves – the men and women who face all manner of hardship in transporting the world’s precious cargo. They are on the frontlines of this battle. Their welfare and safety must also be at the forefront of our concerns.

I commend the IMO for its determination to bring new prominence to this issue in 2011, and I reiterate my personal support, and that of the United Nations as a whole, to this important initiative.

Thank you.
1. Secretary-General Mitropoulos, Secretary-General Ban-ki-Moon, Executive Director of UNODC Yury Fedotov, President of the IMO Assembly, Commissioner, Admirals, distinguished delegates and observers, ladies and gentlemen. I am honored to be here today as the International Maritime Organization makes piracy the focus of 2011.

2. We have heard of the high cost of piracy to the world economy, to the horn of Africa, and to the wellbeing of the seafarers who risk their lives each day on the open sea. I want to put a human face on this issue, something Secretary General Ban-ki-Moon discussed as well.

3. On 10 December, the MSC [MSC -- Mediterranean Shipping Company] Panama, with 200 containers of urgently needed food for Zimbabwe and DRC was hijacked by Somali pirates off the coast of Mozambique. This act literally takes food out of the mouths of vulnerable babies and the elderly, hungry people who struggle to find just a cup of food a day. Even if we were to recover the shipment today, much of the food may have been spoiled. The delay in delivery means a delay in food protects the youngest minds and bodies from the permanent injury of malnutrition; food that provides hope and stability to a people who have endured so much for so long.

4. Piracy off the coast of Somalia is a threat, first and foremost, to Somalis themselves, particularly the women and children who rely on the World Food Programme’s food lifeline. Somalia is a country with 1.5 million [UNHCR] displaced people fleeing conflict and deprivation, with some of the highest malnutrition rates in the world, and in the south of the country a staggering one in four children are suffering from acute malnutrition.

5. Ocean transport remains the main, most cost effective and fastest means of relief food delivery to Somalia. Just about all of our food to Somalia arrives by sea. WFP’s food is literally a vital lifeline for the women and children, fleeing rape, killings and hunger.

6. We know that without food, people either migrate, they revolt, or they die. By ensuring the unhindered supply of WFP’s cargo to other destinations we will not only be containing the spillover effect from Somalia but ensuring stability in the region in its own right.

7. That’s why when we called on the world to secure our vital food shipments to Somalia in October, 2007, and the world responded, it saved lives. Since November 2007, WFP has been able to transport 605,000 tons of life-saving cargo directly to Somalia, largely unhindered, due to the provision of escorts by France, Denmark, the Netherlands (two rounds), Canada, NATO and EU Operation Atalanta.

8. Before the escort system started, there were many attacks, threatening our food lifeline, including three hijackings in 2005 and 2006, and an additional three in 2007. One ship, the MV Rosen, was hijacked twice, held for 40 days in 2006, and for six weeks the following year.

9. The naval escorts have not only helped WFP protect cargo but also helped us charter vessels. In 2010, there was a short time period when the naval escorts were not available and as a result some ship owners refused to carry WFP food while others demanded higher freight rates due to the risks involved in the passage.

10. We are extremely grateful to the EU, NATO and other nations that committed themselves to providing naval escorts to ships carrying WFP food assistance. Your assistance has meant that no ship carrying WFP food into Somalia has been hijacked.
11. However, today we are faced with new challenges. The presence of Somali pirates in an ever expanding area is of great concern because they threaten not just food bound for directly for Somalia, but our food transiting through the ports of Mombasa (Kenya), Dar es Salam (Tanzania) and Beira (Mozambique) for vital operations in Zimbabwe, the DRC and other places with great humanitarian needs.

12. For example, in 2009, the Maersk Alabama carrying WFP vital food for Kenya, Uganda and Somalia was hijacked. In Kenya, WFP does not only ensure food security for 380,000 Somali and Sudanese refugees but also provides much needed nutritional support to 180,000 individuals. And now, the MSC Panama is being held.

13. I want to thank all the ambassadors and representatives here for your help in protecting WFP food to Somalia. I want to reiterate the importance of not only continuing these escorts but expanding the program to include other dangerous waters in the wider Indian Ocean.

14. I whole heartily agree with Secretary-General Ban-ki-Moon that it is important to support livelihoods in Somalia to solve the problem of piracy. We need a broad-based approach to address land-based responses to piracy and targeted programs along the coast and hinterland of Somaliland, Puntland and parts of central Somalia.

15. WFP’s work, along with the UN community, and the support of so many nations, can help solve this.

16. I thank the International Maritime Organization and Secretary-General Mitropoulos for their leadership on this issue, and this comprehensive action plan to eradicate piracy. I would like to thank Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for all he is doing to keep safe seas front and center on the global agenda, in particular in those areas that affect crucial humanitarian supplies.

17. For the hungry mothers and young children who are dependent upon WFP’s food, your efforts are saving lives. Let’s redouble our efforts to ensure that these vital supplies reach those most in need.

18. Thank You.
Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. Mitropoulos,
Ms. Sheeran,
Mr. Lorenz-Meyer
Mr. David Cockroft

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here on World Maritime Day for the launch of the International Maritime Organization’s Counter-Piracy Action Plan. UNODC looks forward to continued cooperation with the IMO and other organizations and agencies in tackling piracy off the Horn of Africa.

I would like to acknowledge Secretary-General Ban’s strong leadership on counter-piracy efforts, and I welcome last week’s report by Special Advisor Mr. Jack Lang to the Security Council. The report recommends further strengthening of a coordinated international response to stop piracy off the coast of Somalia. This is consistent with UNODC’s counter-piracy programme, which focuses on supporting regional prosecutions and on rebuilding Somalia’s criminal justice capacity. UNODC stands ready to support the implementation of the report’s recommendations as directed by Member States.

The maritime expertise of the IMO and the criminal justice know-how of UNODC are complementary, and we rely on each other in our counter-piracy efforts. The IMO provides excellent anti-piracy advice to mariners that has helped to reduce attacks. In the past two years, UNODC has assisted regional countries prosecute a significant number of pirates. We have been asked to produce some 30 civilian witnesses for piracy trials in Kenya and the Seychelles, and we did so. These witnesses have played an indispensable role in achieving piracy convictions, and I would like to thank the IMO for its help in securing the cooperation of the shipping industry in making these witnesses available.

Although Somali piracy is a maritime problem, its origins are on land. The only viable long-term solution to Somali piracy is to address the problems that plague Somalia itself.

UNODC’s Counter-Piracy Programme, established in 2009, is an integral part of our Somalia strategy, which aims to restore stability and the rule of law in this country. Today we have staff based in Somaliland and Puntland in Somalia, and more in Kenya, the Seychelles
and Mauritius. The number of staff we have in the field is only limited by resources. I look forward to seeing the impact of their work firsthand when I visit the region in the spring.

UNODC also cooperates closely with the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia, serving as Secretariat for Working Group 2 on Legal Issues and as Manager of its Trust Fund. The Trust Fund is an important instrument for confronting piracy, and I hope that Member States and the private sector will continue to support it.

UNODC’s Counter-Piracy Programme is trying to achieve three major objectives:

- fair and efficient trials and imprisonment of piracy suspects in regional countries;
- humane and secure imprisonment in Somalia; and
- in the longer term (and despite the challenges involved), fair and efficient trials in Somalia itself.

So far, the Programme has proved effective in supporting regional efforts to detain and prosecute pirates. We are building the capacity of regional States by training police, prosecutors and prison administrators to deal with piracy suspects. Trials are fair and efficient, with due respect for human rights.

With support from the international community, 740 suspected and convicted pirates are now in detention in 13 countries; almost half of them are in Somalia itself. Recently, the first new prison in 30 years opened in Somalia. And with funding from the British Government, UNODC is about to refurbish and upgrade a prison in Puntland where Somali pirates convicted in other countries can be transferred to serve out their sentences.

Kenya, which has taken the lead in regional prosecutions, is currently trying 69 suspected pirates and has convicted 50 perpetrators. The Seychelles is a small country, but it has undertaken piracy prosecutions far out of proportion to its size, with 31 already convicted and 16 suspected pirates on trial now.

Yet it is clear that prosecutions and imprisonment of convicted Somali pirates pose a heavy burden for countries in the region. The main impediment has been the imprisonment of convicted pirates for the length of their sentences, which generally range from 5 to 20 years. There are also a number of challenges relating to the capacity of regional States, including prison conditions and access to defence lawyers. UNODC’s Counter-Piracy Programme is addressing these problems in Kenya and the Seychelles.

These regional challenges make it all the more urgent that we strengthen Somalia’s own capacity to prosecute and imprison pirates. By building up currently weak institutions in those parts of Somalia where we are able to work, we are helping to address a problem originating from its shores within a rule-of-law framework, and also beginning to build pride and capacity in Somalia’s own institutions.

Many challenges remain, but I believe that ongoing efforts to tackle maritime piracy are showing some success, and with the right support from the international community, they have the potential to become even more effective and lead to a long-term solution. The IMO Action Plan will play an important role in this process, and UNODC looks forward to cooperating with you in its implementation.

Stopping piracy off the Horn of Africa will benefit the international community, but we must not forget those who will benefit most: the Somali people. Piracy is feeding off the instability, weak governance and poverty that plague Somalia. By strengthening the rule of law to combat piracy, we are also helping Somalia to rebuild a more just and stable society for all its citizens. Thank you.
Mr. Robert Lorenz-Meyer, President, BIMCO

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General Mitropoulos, your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, friends, ladies and gentlemen!

It is an immense pleasure and great honour for me, as President of BIMCO and equally on behalf of our partners within the Round Table of international shipping associations, the International Chamber of Shipping, INTERTANKO and INTERCARGO, to have the privilege to speak and to extend our thanks, to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on behalf of the industry.

Although the international shipping associations have found it natural to communicate their specific messages and appeals to the United Nations and more specifically to the UN Security Council through the IMO Secretary General, we wish to formally acknowledge and express our deep-felt gratitude to Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for his understanding of the severity of piracy attacks on merchant ships. The industry is well aware of the commitment you have made to eradicate the menace of piracy and to support the deployment and use of naval forces to counter pirate attacks.

Unfortunately, the situation has worsened during the past year, with fiercer and increasing attacks on ships. The increased use of so called ‘mother ships’ has enabled the pirates to operate at a vastly greater range, with increased capability and with seeming impunity well out into the Indian Ocean. Today there are more than 700 seafarers held hostages for ransom on 32 ships. In short, this does not speak well for the effectiveness of the measures taken by the international community. The launch of the 2011 IMO initiative “Piracy – orchestrating the response” is timely, highly appropriate and welcome! The initiative is very appropriately succeeding the “Year of the Seafarer”!

We can all speculate about how seafarers are reacting to being held hostage, exposed to heavily armed pirates, threatened, severely mistreated, in many cases abused and starved for long periods of time. We can certainly also imagine the anxiety of their families, not knowing the fate of their love-ones and fearing the worst! The international community must act at a strategic level and with resolve to restore law and order; individual states must adapt their national legislation to allow their naval forces to intercept pirates with confidence. The necessary legal framework for the arrest, prosecution and sentencing of these criminals must be in place and be firmly enforced. It is imperative that the practise of catch-and-release is discontinued and apprehended pirates brought to trial!

In support of the IMO initiative on piracy, the shipping industry will seek to inform and influence public opinion by means of media coverage. We sincerely hope to solicit greater public and political awareness and support for a more robust and effective response. The attacks are not only attacks on ships, but also attacks on the global supply chain in one of the world’s most vital sea lanes. They threaten a supply line of vital interests to the international community. International shipping is the servant of world trade and thus the facilitator of globalisation, prosperity and economic growth.

They also threaten the all-important distribution of food and other humanitarian aid to the region. In acknowledgment of the importance of the role of shipping, merchant shipping has been given very clear privileges under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, specifically the right to safe passage on the High Seas.

We would therefore expect the international community and signatories to this convention jointly, to ensure that the letter and spirit of the Convention are upheld. We wish to reiterate our
appeal to you, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, to continue your efforts to find suitable and lasting solutions to the unacceptable attacks on innocent merchant ships. We appeal through you to the Security Council of the United Nations to increase the naval presence to a level and capacity that will restore and secure lasting law and order in these important sea lanes and facilitate the arrest and prosecution of apprehended pirates. The international community through the United Nations should more concretely work towards bringing normality back to Somalia and establishing a well-functioning and stable society ashore. Without robust and effective counter measures, piracy will continue to threaten the safe passage of the thousands of seafarers that ply these waters and thus make the use of this important sea-lane an unacceptable risk to ship-owners.

I thank you most sincerely for your continued efforts on behalf of the shipping industry and for your kind attention today.
Mr Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Secretary General of the IMO, Excellencies, I speak today on behalf of the world’s seafarers.

2010 was designated the Year of the Seafarer – an initiative from Mr Mitropoulos which we strongly welcomed. World Maritime Day in the year of the seafarer brought the shipping industry together like never before. We helped to organise a joint industry petition on piracy consisting of a million signatures calling on governments and international bodies to act to end piracy now.

And why? One reason is that piracy has a big economic cost and a massive human cost.

According to a recent study by the One Earth Foundation, it currently amounts to up to 12 billion dollars a year. The industry is facing daily demands for increased ransoms, insurance costs are rocketing, the economic and environmental cost of rerouting ships around the Cape of Good Hope, the cost of naval protection and increasingly use of private security forces all add to the cost.

The Suez Canal may be one of the biggest casualties if ships divert and do not go into the high risk area. Let us not forget that the increased area of operation of the pirates means that nearly half of the world’s seaborne oil supply passes through this pirate infested area and to keep that oil flowing there is no alternative other than to go through the high risk area. Given the fragility of the global economy an oil shock, like the 1970’s, would be devastating.

The impact of the current situation on the seafarers cannot be underestimated and they are at breaking point. We need to reflect on the stress and the trauma passing through the high risk area generates. The stress and trauma increases when the vessel is attacked. Avoiding capture may involve a sustained armed attack against the ship, with the bridge windows being shot out and the ship, including the accommodation area, being hit by rocket propelled grenades. In a recent case it was by 6 RPG’s.

The time seafarers are held has increased and during this time they may be subject to physical and psychological torture. The ITF and its industry partners are looking to put in place a humanitarian support network for those seafarers and their families who need help and who fall through the net.

But even if and when they are released, the crew face massive trauma and their families have also been effected. Seafarers are being held for increasingly long periods – the Panamanian flagged ICEBERG I has been held since 29 March 2010.

Today there are more than 700 seafarers being held hostage by Somali pirates.

So we strongly welcome the IMO Action Plan. We need coordinated action yes, but it has to be both at sea and ashore. Both short term, and long term.

The naval forces in the region are doing a remarkable job under very difficult circumstances. They need more support, more freedom to act and to be permitted to disrupt pirate camps. They also need more countries ready to put pirates on trial.

But the real solution must be to eliminate the threat not just trying to manage an acceptable level of piracy. The risk area is growing, the pirates are becoming more sophisticated and
better armed. There will never be enough naval assets to counter them. We need robust political and military intervention on shore, led by the key states in the region.

But there is also the fundamental issue of the role of flag states. Many states have committed naval vessels and we saw how the Korean navy took fast and effective military action when their citizens were threatened. But we don’t seem to see the same response from some of the major big shipping registries such as Panama, Liberia, or Cyprus (I could name more) when their ships are attacked.

States, which have decided to earn major financial benefits by operating a Convenient shipping register, should take their responsibilities for those who crew those ships seriously. Naval force would be ideal but as a minimum they should be paying serious money to build counter-piracy infrastructure. They should also be the leading states providing the means to prosecute and imprison the pirates which attack vessels which fly their flag.

Today seafarers face the serious possibility that they may be kidnapped, held hostage and subject to a level of abuse, to the point that it constitutes torture, in order to finance what has become an increasingly powerful arm of global organised crime.

We welcome the IMO Action Plan, the dedication of Secretary General Mitropoulos to the cause of the seafarer. We are encouraged that Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has supported its launch.

For the world’s seafarers and for those who depend on the cargoes they carry and, ultimately, for the sake of the global economy.

End Piracy Now.