IMO Polar Workshop  
28 February 2014  
Opening remarks  
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Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all to this workshop, bringing together scientists, regulators and industry to consider issues and strategies for ensuring safe ship operations in the Arctic Ocean. As you are all well aware, the anticipated exchange of information is particularly significant in view of the on-going work of this Organization on the development of a mandatory international code for ships operating in polar waters, the polar code in short, which will cover the full range of design, construction, equipment, operational, training, search and rescue and environmental protection matters relevant to ships operating in the inhospitable and environmentally sensitive waters surrounding the two poles. I am pleased that the Organization serves as the host for this special event, providing us with an opportunity to listen to the views of the scientific community, as a supplement to our usual gatherings of representatives of maritime administrations and the shipping industry.

The safety of ships operating in the harsh, remote and vulnerable polar areas and the protection of the pristine environments around the two poles have always been a matter of concern for IMO and many relevant requirements, provisions and recommendations have been developed over the years. Trends and forecasts indicate that polar shipping will grow in volume and diversify in nature over the coming years and these challenges need to be met without compromising either safety of life at sea or the polar environments.

Ships operating in the Arctic and Antarctic environments are exposed to a number of unique risks. The relative lack of good charts, communication systems and other navigational aids pose challenges for mariners. The remoteness of the areas makes rescue or clean-up operations difficult and costly. Cold temperatures may reduce the effectiveness of numerous components of the ship, ranging from deck machinery and emergency equipment to sea suctions. When ice is present, it can impose additional loads on the hull, propulsion system and appendages.

Some of you may be aware that I have been able to observe, at first hand, during 2013, the weather and sea conditions in the polar areas and experienced for myself ice-breaking activities
and navigation in the Arctic Ocean with full support of the Russian Federation. I also visited Antarctica, thanks to the hospitality of the Government of Chile, in December 2012. These visits reinforced my view that we all must work together to make ship operations around the poles safe, environmentally sound and sustainable.

A universally accepted regulatory framework is essential for sustainable development in shipping – and the world looks to IMO to provide that framework. IMO measures are designed, among other things, to promote safety, to protect the environment, to improve efficiency and to ensure a properly trained workforce.

There are already a number of measures in place or under development that specifically address operations in polar regions. In March 2012, for example, a timetable for bringing the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System up to date was agreed by the COMSAR Sub-Committee.

The review of the GMDSS will look specifically into the communication requirements for the polar areas, including the use of more modern communication technologies, in recognition of the unique challenges of search and rescue in remote areas.

And, to better reflect the need for navigational and meteorological information and to identify the responsibilities of coastal State providers in the region, the provision of Maritime Safety Information has been updated for the Arctic, including the creation of new NAVAREAs and METAREAs up to 90 degrees north.

IMO has also adopted important guidelines for ships operating in remote areas, such as the 2006 Guide for Cold Water Survival and the 2007 Guidelines on Voyage Planning for Passenger Ships Operating in Remote Areas.

Moreover, recent amendments to the Convention on Standards for Training Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) provide for new training guidance for personnel serving on board ships operating in polar waters.

But the most important initiative for the development of appropriate safety and environmental regulation for Arctic shipping at IMO is the development of the mandatory polar code. The move to develop the polar code followed the adoption in 2009 of Guidelines for ships operating in polar waters, which sets out additional provisions deemed necessary for the polar areas beyond the requirements of existing conventions. But, whereas the Guidelines are recommendatory, the IMO membership has agreed that the polar code would be a mandatory instrument, setting out internationally binding requirements appropriate for the severe environmental conditions of the
polar areas, over and above those already contained in existing instruments, such as the SOLAS and MARPOL Conventions.

Work to finalize the code at the end of this year is well underway, with IMO’s committees and sub-committees making special efforts to ensure the completion date is adhered to. The Marine Environment Protection Committee and the Maritime Safety Committee, meeting during March/April and May, respectively, will make maximum resources available to resolve the remaining issues, based on the contributions of the sub-committees on ship design and construction, on the human element, training and watchkeeping and on ship systems and equipment, all of which have been tasked with the completion of relevant parts of the code falling under their remit.

During this workshop, two pertinent current projects, funded by the National Science Foundation of the United States and the European Commission, respectively, will present the latest results of their research and we all look forward to hearing about:

• the project Holistic integration for Arctic coastal-marine sustainability, with the objective of developing and demonstrating an international, interdisciplinary and inclusive process to enhance the practice of governance and sustainability in Arctic coastal-marine systems; and

• the project Arctic Climate Change, Economy and Society, with the objective of assessing climatic change impacts on marine transportation, including tourism, fisheries, marine mammals and the extraction of oil and gas in the Arctic Ocean.

The presentations on the two projects will be supplemented by contributions from eminent speakers, covering a wide range of subjects such as the polar code; the work of the Arctic Council; the Northern Sea Route; sea-ice trends; Arctic Ocean economics, including commercial shipping and shipborne tourism; Arctic peoples perspectives; insurance issues; marine navigation and charts; and institutional interplay. I am sure that all this will provide a large amount of food for thought which in turn will hopefully make for spirited and interesting panel discussions.

This workshop is an opportunity to open our doors to others who are not usually part of the regulatory process at IMO, enabling all of us to take a fresh look at wider perspectives and different horizons and consider issues that may not be listed on the current work programme of the Organization. I feel sure that the collective expertise of the experts gathered here today will make this event stimulating, lively and thought-provoking.
Thank you.