

CONCEPT NOTE

Working and Living at Sea: *Challenges and Risks to Seafarers' Human Rights and Safety*

A panel discussion on the sidelines of the 56th Session of the Human Rights Council to commemorate the International Day of Seafarers

25 June 2024, 14:00-15:00, Room XXIV, Palais des Nations

BACKGROUND

There are around 1.9 million seafarers, 1.2% of whom are women. Seafarers are key to maintaining global supply chains and commerce. They are essential workers in maritime transport.

Ships carry around 90% of global trade. Almost everything that sustains our societies and lifestyles is made accessible by global supply chains that depend on maritime transport and the men and women behind it.

Seafarers are therefore indispensable to the normal functioning of society and, ultimately, the progressive realization of a wide range of human rights.

But for far too long, seafarers have often been treated like the commodities they help transport. In the cold calculation of costs and profits, the human rights of seafarers sometimes take a backseat.

Life at sea poses risks to the human rights, safety, and well-being of seafarers.

Unpaid wages, abandonment, lack of access to medical and welfare facilities, criminalization and lack of access to remedy, unlawful attacks against merchant vessels, discrimination, and violence and harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying, and sexual assault, are serious human rights issues faced by seafarers.

These are continuing problems in the maritime sector that are exacerbated in crisis situations. They go largely unnoticed and underappreciated for as long as societies continue to function as normal.

The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, exposed the harshness of life at sea, the vulnerabilities of seafarers, and the inadequacies of existing mechanisms to protect and promote seafarers' rights and welfare.

Looking ahead, continuing efforts to improve the working and living conditions of seafarers, including within the framework of the International Labor Organization and International Maritime Organization, must be informed by human rights perspectives.

OBJECTIVES

The panel discussion will gather representatives from key stakeholders in the maritime shipping industry to exchange views on the:

- Challenges, including emerging ones, that impinge on the human rights and well-being of seafarers;
- Policy and institutional gaps in the promotion and protection of human rights at sea; and
- Way forward and best practices in promoting decent and humane working and living conditions at sea, in line with international human rights instruments, the Maritime Labor Convention of 2006, as amended, and other relevant ILO instruments.