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Key worker status for seafarers urged in TMS Covid-19 Webinar

21st May 2020, UAE: The Maritime Standard has held its second Covid 19-A Leadership Perspective Webinar, once again generating positive feedback from a global virtual audience. This time panelists focused on the growing seafarer crisis, caused by the inability to undertake crew changes as usual, during the Webinar, which took place on Wednesday 20th May.

While the Webinar covered a wide range of issues, from ways of addressing seafarer mental health issues, overcoming barriers to air travel restrictions, the need for a move to a more cashless means of paying seafarers and creating an optimum corona virus testing, isolating and treating process, a common theme was the need for coordinated international action at government level, and for a global drive to recognise seafarers as key workers deserving of special treatment.

One of the highlights of the Webinar was Dr Ruanthi De Silva, of Sri Lanka-based SCM Plus, who read out a short but moving prayer, which called for seafarers to be sent safely back to the ones they love. "Empathy, understanding and assurance will go a long way in this situation," she added.

Ali Shehab, Acting CEO, Kuwait Oil Tanker Company (KOTC) and Nitin Mehta, CEO, Tomini Shipping, presented useful insights as shipowners. The need to accelerate digital transformation in shipping, to support seafarers, was highlighted by Ali, while Nitin pointed out that seafarers are key components within global supply chains and called upon governments to establish nodal centres where crew changes could take place. They were joined by John Ramage, COO, International Registries which represents the

leading Marshall Islands flag state, who echoed these sentiments. “Under the ‘new normal’ seafarers are not going to be able to be replaced everywhere. So, we have to work with governments to identify areas around the work where reliefs can take place safely and that will require a lot of planning as well as forbearance by crew,” he said.



Captain Sanjeev Sharma, Managing Director, Bernhard Schulte Ship Management India, illustrated how a top ship manager was dealing with the crisis. “Seafarers are very resilient,” he said, “but there has been a lot of misinformation on social media which has increased anxiety levels. Our efforts are focused on removing that anxiety and community acting effectively with seafarers and their families.”

Clive Woodbridge TMS Editor and Webinar Moderator, added, “There is no doubt that we facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in shipping which ultimately will have wide ranging implications not just for shipping, but for the effectiveness of global trade and supply chains if left unresolved. There are an estimated 150,000 seafarers that are effectively stranded onboard. They are key workers in this crisis, but for many there is no end in sight to their lengthy shifts. The Webinar identified a number of barriers to a speedy resolution to this situation and urged care, compassion and collaboration to reach a suitable solution.”

Sponsored by DNV GL, Tomini Shipping, Islamic P&I Club and JM Baxi the Webinar was watched by an international audience of around 500, many of whom submitted tough questions for the panelists to answer in the second half of the two hour Webinar.



The Maritime Standard will be staging a third Webinar in the series on Wednesday 3rd June, with a theme to be announced shortly.