

STATEMENT OF IMO TO THE 5TH INFORMAL THEMATIC SESSION ON FACILITATING SAFE, ORDERLY AND REGULAR MIGRATION

The International Maritime Organization is the UN specialized agency based in London responsible for safe, secure and efficient shipping and the prevention of pollution from ships, including the safety of life at sea. As such, we are responsible for a range of international legal instruments, including Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) and Search and Rescue (SAR) Conventions and comprehensive guidance and information resources, some of which are of relevance to the unsafe movement of mixed migrants by sea.

The 171 Member States of the IMO recognize that using the search and rescue system enshrined in the SOLAS and SAR Conventions to respond to mass mixed migration was neither foreseen nor intended. Using the search and rescue system and diverting merchant ships is not a viable solution to the migrant crisis. Although Governments and the merchant shipping industry will continue rescue operations, safe, legal, alternative pathways to migration must be developed, including safe, organized migration by sea, if necessary. As IMO represents probably the most international of industries, we fully understand that controlled, legal migration is essential to the sustainability of the global economy.

However, we strongly condemn the illegal people smugglers, the associated profiteers and the misery they cause, loading people onto clearly unsafe vessels. The ultimate solution lies in addressing “push” factors and that is not in IMO’s remit – although IMO has been working with other bodies and agencies (including UNHCR, IOM and UNODC) to promote a coordinated approach.

In June 2017, the Maritime Safety Committee had the opportunity to consider the proposal by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) to support further action by the Organization, in parallel with other United Nations specialized agencies, to promote appropriate and effective action at the United Nations.

According to the information provided by ICS, and despite the welcome increase in government-funded resources and the activity of non-governmental organization vessels, the number of merchant ships involved in rescue operations has remained relatively constant since 2015 and the average number of persons rescued by each merchant ship remains over 110. In 2016, a total of 381 merchant ships were diverted and 121 ships were involved in the rescue of 13,888 people. Of particular concern for the shipping industry is the upward trend in migrants reported dead or missing in 2015 and 2016 which, based on current leading indicators, can be expected to continue into 2017 and beyond.

Member States and international organizations affirmed their concern for the humanitarian situation and the loss of life and agreed that the way forward was to promote appropriate and effective action at the United Nations.

The Committee encouraged Member States and international organizations in consultative status to participate in the Global Compact on Migration (GCM).

The Secretary-General of IMO, Mr. Kitack Lim, reiterated his sincere appreciation to Member States that had been contributing to the rescue of migrants at sea using naval, military and intelligence services