

Friday 27 March 2020

Dear Sir,

In these unprecedented times, I feel compelled to draw your attention to an aspect of the Covid19 outbreak which seems to have been largely overlooked by the Government, press and public, namely the essential role of the maritime industry.

First, a hard fact. 92% of the world's goods are transported by sea.

With this in mind, I strongly believe it's time for governments around the world to designate seafarers as 'key workers'. Failure to recognise them as such will have catastrophic global consequences.

Sadly, the wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of seafarers is currently compromised because they are unable to disembark from vessels at their designated destination upon completion of their contracts.

Most have no choice but to continue working for extended periods of weeks or months. As well as impacting on their health and wellbeing, this situation potentially compromises the safety of ships and, taken to its logical conclusion, will ultimately have a radical impact on the global supply chain of essential goods such as foods, fuel, medicine and equipment.

Seafarers play a significant part in the global economy. All too often, they are unseen and overlooked.

Our industry is doing its best to support its own. Numerous maritime associations are working hard to provide practical guidance and emotional support to those isolated onboard ships.

Many sectors have been severely impacted by the current crisis. The shipping industry has been hit particularly badly at a time when the world needs it most. Ships must be restocked, re-fuelled, inspected and given fresh crews to keep the world's supply chain moving.

I call on decision makers worldwide to help this crucial industry by designating seafarers as 'key personnel' and, in doing so, provide them with adequate safeguards, including rights of embarkation and disembarkation.

The European Commission has issued Guidelines calling for member states to implement Green Lanes to allow the free flow of goods and associated personnel across borders. I urge jurisdictions elsewhere in the world to adopt similar measures.

It is of incalculable importance that they do so.

Graham Westgarth
Chief Executive Officer
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