



Ministry of Transport
460 Alexandra Road,
mTower #33-00
Singapore (119963)

Singapore, 13 January 2021

To Your Excellency Mr. Ong Ye Kung, Minister of Transport

Subject: Crew changes in Covid-19 times – Appreciation for your action

Dear Sir,

We, the Asian and International social partners for maritime transport together with our maritime partners, would like to thank you for being the country to have kept the port open and facilitated crew changes.

Many governments have closed their borders and banned seafarers from coming ashore, even for medical treatment in some cases, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the world's seafarers are trapped working aboard vessels and some of these seafarers have spent 18 months or more continuously aboard way beyond the expiry of the initial contracts they signed up for. This is a humanitarian crisis that must be solved as soon as possible to protect seafarers – who are the front-line workers of global seaborne trade.

We would now urge Singapore to build on the good foundations it has laid through the collective efforts of government and industry as we move into a new phase of the COVID crisis. The fear of new strains of the virus should not threaten the progress made but new opportunities to secure both our public health and economic wellbeing, particularly through the vaccination of seafarers, should be seized upon. Above all we would urge that a proportionate and science based response to new developments in the pandemic is maintained so that maritime commerce continues to function smoothly.

Singapore's action towards seafarers is in line with the UN General Assembly, which on 1 December 2020 adopted a resolution calling for all governments to give seafarers key-worker status, by facilitating international travel and giving seafarers priority access to COVID-19 vaccinations. We are also thankful that Singapore implemented high-quality health protocols to ensure seafarers can move safely and securely to and from ships, via airports and other transport hubs. We do note however the differentiation in treatment by the Maritime and Port Authority of crew members signing on/off cruise ships which we urge you to address as soon as possible.

We acknowledge that all local Singapore based stakeholders in the industry, as well as the IMO, ILO, the maritime industry and trade associations and Asian countries, have been working ceaselessly over the past months to enable smooth crew changes to happen and we greatly appreciate all these efforts. Unfortunately, these protocols have not been consistently implemented across all relevant jurisdiction or by all relevant stakeholders.

The Singapore Shipping Tripartite Alliance Resilience (SG-STAR) Fund has been endorsed by many international social partners for the marine transport and ASA as a gold standard initiative. We appreciate Singapore initiating this fund and recommending other jurisdictions to adopt to facilitate safe crew changes.

Singapore has also brought about closer collaboration between ship operators and charterers to facilitate crew changes to be carried out with the least possible impact in terms of cost and delays as it is a shared responsibility. Ship owners should provide all relevant information on intended crew changes and charterers should make all reasonable efforts to accommodate necessary crew changes, including when the vessels are required to make reasonable deviation.

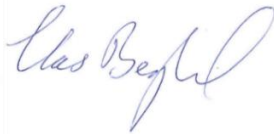
The smooth facilitation of crew changes also depends on airline connectivity between key maritime hubs. The disruption of international air flights caused connectivity issues between major crew change hubs and major seafaring nations. This is an issue which cannot be solved by the maritime industry alone and Singapore has worked closely together with the aviation industry to ensure sufficient airlift capacity is established. This will be extremely important to ensure seafarers, as essential workers for global trade and economy, can be relieved without any further delay.

On behalf of all the signatories of this letter, we are always ready to be in contact with your office to set up a meeting with you to discuss this urgent topic of air connections and how the actions can be facilitated further.

Yours respectfully,



Mr. Yuichi Sonoda
Secretary General
ASA



Claes Berglund
President ECSA



Guy Platten
Secretary General ICS



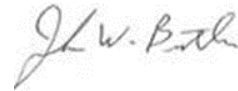
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President ETF



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Director General
CLIA Europe



John W. Butler
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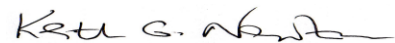
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