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Seafarers need protection from Somali pirates



The following is an edited extract of a June 2011 media release from the shipping industry's *SaveOurSeafarers* (SOS) campaign¹. It highlights the problem of piracy in the Indian Ocean.

Some 62 seafarers have died in the past four years as a direct result of piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, through deliberate murder by pirates, suicide during their captivity, death from malnutrition and disease, drowning, or heart failure just after the hijacking. During the same period, over 3500 seafarers have been kidnapped and held hostage by pirate gangs, who subject them to traumas, such as being used as human shields, being forced to operate their ships as pirate mother ships under pirate control, and to extreme mental as well as physical anguish. Hundreds of these seafarers have been subjected to horrific torture. Many remain traumatised, unable to return to their seafaring careers long after the hijack is over; although some refuse to let the thugs win and are determined to go back to sea.

There are more than 100,000 seafarers at any one time either preparing to go through this area (by training and effecting the so-called 'hardening' of the ship with physical defences) or actually transiting these waters.

The shipping industry recognises and appreciates the constructive supporting role played by the naval forces in this area. But their effectiveness is impeded by the lack of political will in many governments to authorise the arrest and prosecution of detained pirates caught red-handed. This, in turn, restricts naval operations to no more than a 'catch and release' exercise that deters and disrupts pirates only to a limited extent. The vast majority of pirates are released in this way. This government inaction has allowed piracy to spiral out of control.

It is time to stop this outrage and for governments to take action. Governments are specifically requested to take the necessary steps to: reduce the effectiveness of the easily identifiable mother ships; authorise naval forces to hold pirates and deliver them for prosecution and punishment; increase naval assets available in this area; provide greater protection and support for seafarers; and trace and criminalise the organisers and financiers behind the criminal networks.

Further information is available at the SOS website: www.saveourseafarers.com.

¹The editor is indebted to Captain E. A. Flint, MBE, ED (Ret'd), for drawing the media release to his attention.