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Circular Letter No.4204/Add.2  
21 February 2020

To: All IMO Member States  
United Nations and specialized agencies  
Intergovernmental organizations  
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO

Subject: **Joint Statement IMO-WHO on the Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak**

The Director-General of WHO and the Secretary-General of IMO have jointly issued the attached statement to assist States in ensuring that health measures are implemented in ways that minimize unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade.

Member States and international organizations are encouraged to disseminate this joint statement as widely as possible.

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**ANNEX**



**A Joint Statement on the Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak  
- 13 February 2020 -**

On 31 December 2019, the first outbreak of what has now become known globally as the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was reported in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of the People's Republic of China. On 9 January 2020, Chinese authorities reported in the media that the cause of this viral pneumonia was initially identified as a new type of coronavirus, which is different from any other human coronaviruses discovered so far.

Following the advice provided by the Emergency Committee convened under the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) on 30 January 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) and issued a set of Temporary Recommendations.

WHO is working closely with global experts, governments and partners to rapidly expand scientific knowledge on this new virus, to track the spread and virulence of the virus, and to provide advice to countries and the global community on measures to protect health and prevent the spread of this outbreak. Based on recommendations developed by the WHO, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has issued Circular Letter No.4204 of 31 January 2020 to provide information and guidance on the precautions to be taken to minimize risks to seafarers, passengers and others on board ships from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Following the advice of the Emergency Committee, the WHO Director General did not recommend any travel or trade restriction. Countries are stepping up their efforts in line with WHO's recommendations for preparedness and response to this public health risk. At the same time, additional measures are being adopted by countries, ranging from delayed port clearance or refusal of entry, which may cause severe disruption of international maritime traffic, in particular affecting ships, their crews, passengers and cargo.

WHO is working in close consultation with IMO and other partners to assist States in ensuring that health measures be implemented in ways that minimize unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade.

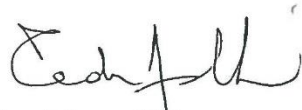
In this connection, WHO and IMO call upon all States to respect the requirements of "free pratique" for ships (IHR (2005) article 28) and the principles of proper care for all travelers and the prevention of unnecessary delays to ships and to persons and property on board, while recognizing the need to prevent the introduction or spread of disease.

IHR States Parties have committed to providing a public health response to the international spread of disease "in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade". Further, IMO's Convention on the Facilitation of Maritime Traffic (commonly known as the "FAL Convention") states that non-Parties to the IHR shall endeavor to apply the IHR to international shipping.

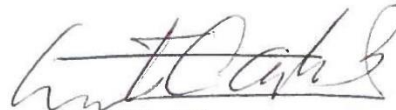
Accordingly, measures interfering with international maritime traffic are subject to provisions of the IHR (2005), including the specific requirements set out in Article 43. Further, it is essential that States Parties implement the IHR with full respect for the dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms of everyone, as stated in Article 3(1). The principles of avoiding unnecessary restrictions or delay on port entry to ships, persons and property on board are also embodied in Articles I and V and section 6 of the annex of the FAL Convention. IHR and IMO regulations must be applied in a consistent manner to secure their common objectives.

In particular, flag State Authorities, port State authorities and control regimes, companies and ship masters should cooperate, in the current context of the outbreak, to ensure that where appropriate, passengers can be embarked and disembarked, cargo operations can occur, ships can enter and depart shipyards for repair and survey, stores and supplies can be loaded, and crews can be exchanged.

The World Health Organization and the International Maritime Organization stand ready to assist and support countries and the maritime industry in responding to the challenges to shipping posed by the current outbreak of novel coronavirus.



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