

MEDIA RELEASE

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Piracy and armed robbery incidents at lowest level in 27 years, but risks remain to seafarers, IMB cautions

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The ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB) received the lowest number of reported incidents for the first half of any year since 1994.

IMB's latest global piracy report details 68 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships – the lowest total since 1994 – down from 98 incidents during the same period last year. In the first six months of 2021, IMB's Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC) reported 61 vessels boarded, four attempted attacks, two vessels fired upon and one vessel hijacked.

Despite the overall decline in reported incidents, violence against crews has continued with 50 crew kidnapped, three each threatened and taken hostage, two assaulted, one injured and one killed throughout the first half of 2021.

While the reduced numbers of reported incidents is welcome, the IMB PRC continues to caution against complacency. Vessels were boarded in 91% of the reported incidents.

Cautious gains in Gulf of Guinea

The Gulf of Guinea continues to be particularly dangerous for seafarers with 32% of all reported incidents taking place in the region, according to IMB. The region accounted for all 50 kidnapped crew and the single crew fatality recorded by IMB during the first half of 2021.

The number of kidnappings recorded in the Gulf of Guinea in the last quarter is the lowest since Q2 2019, but pirates continue to target all vessel types throughout the region. IMB warns that fishing vessels have been hijacked in the Gulf of Guinea and later used as mother ships to target other merchant vessels.

“Whilst IMB welcomes reduced piracy and armed robbery activity in the Gulf of Guinea, the risk to seafarers still remains,” said IMB Director Michael Howlett. “By reporting all incidents to the Regional Authorities and IMB PRC, seafarers can maintain pressure against pirates. Bringing together maritime response authorities through initiatives – like Nigeria’s Deep Blue Project and Gulf of Guinea Maritime Collaboration Forum – will continue and strengthen knowledge sharing channels and reduce risk to seafarers in the region.”

In early June, a bulk carrier was approached by a skiff with six pirates while transitioning through the region at around 210nm off the coast of Lagos.

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The carrier – equipped with appropriate vessel hardening – was able to prevent the armed pirates from coming onboard, but the incident demonstrates the continued capacity of pirates in the region to carry out attacks at further distances from the coast.

Knife attacks in Singapore Straits

The Singapore Straits recorded 16 incidents in the first six months of 2021, in comparison to 11 during the same period in 2020. These attacks are considered opportunistic in nature, but IMB warns that in seven incidents the perpetrators were armed with knives. In three separate incidents, seafarers were reported to have been either threatened, assaulted or injured.

Incidents rise off the coast of Peru

In comparison to the first half of 2019 and 2020, Callao Anchorage, Peru has experienced a two-fold increase in the number of incidents with nine incidents reported in total for 2021. There were four incidents in Q2 2021 and knives reported in three of these, according to the latest figures from IMB. Perpetrators in the region possess the capacity to carry out violent attacks with two separate incidents of crew being taken hostage and assaulted occurring in the first six months of 2021.

Manila Bay, Philippines

Vessels are advised to take precautionary measures while anchored in Manila Bay, Philippines, as four incidents were reported to IMB for Q2 2021.

“Reporting piracy and armed robbery incidents is the first line of defence against future attacks,” said ICC Secretary General John W.H. Denton AO. “Sustained reporting to IMB will enable governments, maritime response agencies and other stakeholders to establish safer waters for our seafarers and smooth flow of goods throughout global supply chains.”

IMB Piracy Reporting Centre

Founded in 1991, the IMB PRC’s 24-hour manned centre remains a single point of contact to report the crimes of piracy and armed robbery. The centre has not only assisted ships in a timely manner, it also provides the maritime industry, response agencies and governments with transparent data – received directly from the Master of the vessel under attack - or its owners.

The IMB PRC’s prompt forwarding of reports and liaison with response agencies, its broadcasts to shipping via GMDSS Safety Net Services and email alerts to ships’ CSOs (Company Security Officers), all provided free of charge, has helped the response against piracy and armed robbery and the security of seafarers, globally.

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