

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE



Message for Sea Sunday 2013

(14th July 2013)

“This world of the sea, with the continuous migration of people today, must take into account the complex effects of globalization and, unfortunately, must come to grips with situations of injustice, especially when the freedom of a ship’s crew to go ashore is restricted, when they are abandoned altogether along with the vessels on which they work, when they risk piracy at sea and the damage of illegal fishing. The vulnerability of seafarers, fishermen and sailors calls for an even more attentive solicitude on the Church’s part and should stimulate the motherly care that, through you, she expresses to all those whom you meet in ports and on ships or whom you help on board during those long months at sea”. These words were addressed by Pope Benedict XVI to the participants of the XXIII AOS Congress held in the Vatican City, November 19-23, 2012. As a matter of fact, for more than 90 years the Catholic Church, through the *Work of the Apostleship of the Sea* with its network of chaplains and volunteers in more than 260 ports of the world, has shown her *motherly care* by providing spiritual and material welfare to seafarers, fishers and their families.

As we celebrate **Sea Sunday**, we would like to invite every member of our Christian communities to become aware and recognize the work of an estimated 1.2 to 1.5 million seafarers who at anytime are sailing in a globalized worldwide fleet of 100,000 ships carrying 90 per cent of the manufactured goods. Very often, we do not realize that the majority of the objects we use in our daily life are transported by ships crisscrossing the oceans. Multinational crews experience complex living and working conditions on board, months away from their loved ones, abandonment in foreign ports without salaries, criminalization and natural (storms, typhoons, etc.) and human (pirates, shipwreck, etc.) calamities.

Now a beacon of hope is beaming in the dark night of these problems and difficulties encountered by the seafarers.

The ILO Maritime Labor Convention 2006 (MLC 2006), after being ratified by 30 Member countries of the International Labor Office, representing almost 60 per cent of the world’s gross shipping tonnage, is set to enter into force in August 2013. This Convention is the result of several years of relentless tripartite (governments, employers and workers) discussions to consolidate and update a great number of maritime labor Conventions and Recommendations adopted since 1920.

The MLC 2006 establishes the minimum international requirements for almost every aspect of seafarers' working and living conditions, including fair terms of employment, medical care, social security protection and access to shore-based welfare facilities.

While, as AOS, we are welcoming the entering into force of the Convention and confidently hope to see improvements on the life of the seafarers, we remain vigilant and express our *attentive solicitude* by focusing our consideration on the Regulation 4.4 of the Convention, the purpose of which is to: *ensure that seafarers working on board a ship have access to shore-based facilities and services to secure their health and well-being*.

We should cooperate with the proper authorities in our respective ports so that to all seafarers shore leave be granted as soon as possible after a ship's arrival in port, for the benefit of their health and well-being (*cf.* B4.4.6§5)

We should remind to port states that they shall promote the development of shore-based welfare facilities easily accessible to seafarers, irrespective of nationality, race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, or social origin and of the flag state on which they are employed (*cf.* A4.4§1.).

We should assist the proper authorities to establish national and local welfare boards that would serve as a channel for improving seafarer's welfare at ports, bringing together people from different types of organization under one identity (*cf.* B4.4.3).

We should also encourage the port authorities to introduce, aside from other forms of financing, a port levy system to provide a reliable mechanism to support sustainable welfare services in the port (*cf.* B4.4.4 §1(b)).

Our final responsibility is towards the seafarers. We should provide them information and education about their rights and the protection offered by this Convention, which is also considered the fourth and final pillar of the international maritime legislation, the other three being the *International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) 1973*, the *International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974*, the *International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) 1978*. An effective implementation will be possible and real changes will happen only if the people of the sea will know the content of the MLC 2006.

Let ask *Mary, the Star of the Sea*, to enlighten and accompany our mission to support the work of the faithful who are called to witness to their Christian life in the maritime world (*cf.* *Motu Proprio Stella Maris* Sec. 1, Art. I).

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