

“THE SHIP AND HER PEOPLE”: GIVING OUR INDUSTRY A HUMAN FACE
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Reverend Von Dreele, friends and members of NAMMA, it is a privilege for me to join with you today to say some things, in what a friend of mine calls “the context of lunch,” about the importance of seafarers to the maritime industry’s image and how they, the seafarers, can make an effective statement to the world about what shipping is all about. “The ship and her people” is a familiar toast when a ship is named. But do we remember “the people”? No doubt there was a time when a company official or boss might have worked up the ladder from the dunnage deck, bridge, or even the engine spaces. This is rarely true today.

At the national level and in the international arena, the way we strive toward “safer ships, cleaner seas,” is to impose obligations and make rules. These take the form of laws and international conventions. The most famous of these have acronyms or initials: SOLAS, MARPOL, STCW, ISM, ISPS, to name a familiar few.

However, we seem to lack the means, or at least the will, to ask actual seafarers whether this regulatory thicket is effective or sensible. Nor do we inquire whether their input would help us regulators do our jobs better. An example of why I, for one, have serious concerns about our failure to include the working world of the mariner in our rulemaking process, and particularly at the consultation stage, is the famous maritime mystery of the oily water separator. Why do we “criminalize” the hapless seafarers for accidental as well as deliberate dumping of oil residues, when it may not actually be their fault? Have any of us taken the time or made the effort, to investigate what in fact is happening, or why? Or whether the regulations lack anything?

I for one have no answers. Nor, I must admit, have I ever asked a ship’s engineer! When we frame or draft today’s international conventions, including STCW, the ISPS and ISM codes, we may forget the fact that senior management often lacks seagoing experience. Therefore our task, if the industry is to have a human face, is, as I see it, to bring the active-duty seafarer to the attention of the public and political leaders. This is no mere image-polishing exercise. It is vital if we are to produce a “culture of inclusion,” that we include the seafarer as part of our “human face.” Quite frankly, the current trend toward criminalization of various seafarer-related infractions is unlikely to lead to this result.

Admittedly, solving this problem is more easily said than done. My experience is that if seafarers do find a voice, it will be on the observer delegations at IMO. The ship’s crew must obviously be engaged in the legislative process, in order to achieve better results.

We have all, I think, taken note of what the industry is and does; we know that ships carry about 90% of the world’s trade, worth about 8.9 trillion dollars. In 2004, the rate of growth of global trade in goods – carried by sea at some point — was 9%, compared with 5% in 2003 and 3.5% in 2002. We are, in other words, engaged in one of the most essential human activities. And it is rapidly growing.

At the same time, however, we acknowledge that ships and those who deal with them suffer from a lack of public as well as political standing. Dr. Helmut Sohmen, Honorary

President of BIMCO, and one of our most constructive as well as thoughtful leaders, recently observed that shipping has reached a “transformational” stage in its evolution: being subjected to increasing political pressures on how the industry does its work; assailed by widespread doubt about the industry’s ability to police itself; public suspicions about some shipowners and their standards of care; security threats to the transport of goods by sea; the criminalization of seafarers; and worries about the future availability of qualified mariners.

The Secretary General of the Intergovernmental Maritime Organization (IMO), the UN maritime agency, Admiral Mitropoulos, has described the problem of image with great clarity: politicians, he says, are to an increasing extent the industry’s regulators. It is always popular, and usually convenient to take a swipe at the shipping industry. Usually, this takes the form of a fiery sound bite largely stuffed with emotive rhetoric with little, if any, factual substance behind it. In the words of Admiral Mitropoulos, “Shipping has very few votes, and public opinion is not as well informed as we would like it to be.”

I would suggest two things: our industry’s public image suffers because we seem to lack the will or ability to make a positive, universal statement of what we’re committed to do. This, I realize, may seem fatuous, but the absence of an explicit, industry-wide statement of commitment to safety and environmentally sound management is a factor in negative perceptions held by public and parliaments alike. Frankly, “something to say” goes beyond the commonly heard recital of how important ships are to commerce. It requires more emphasis on our willingness to follow an express standard of corporate responsibility; our commitment to the people, afloat and ashore; to the environment; and to property. I would urge that we agree on a definition of good global citizenship, in the same terms as many industries already do: a clear mission statement, expressing a pledge, in which industry and governments “sign on” to specific principles, with which we undertake to conduct our operations, and our relationships with the public.

For this reason, we need the IMO. That organization is perfectly placed to articulate the industry’s “mission statement,” or commitment to corporate or collective responsibility, and to engage the “people,” *i.e.*, the crew, as well as management ashore, in getting the right result.

How often we forget “the people” --the seafarers-- themselves! The growing wave of international and national regulation (and Canada, The United States, and the European Union are not laggards in this department) takes seemingly little account of what a ship’s crew is or what human lives are actually like, afloat.

Moreover, from the image standpoint, nothing will enhance a more positive public view of shipping as a disciplined calling, than if the seafarer becomes a more visible icon of our culture, to articulate “who we are, and what we do”.

You may ask: what can namma, and other organizations like it, do?

First, as was the case during the law of the sea conference, faith-based organizations can play a more prominent role, internationally, on delegations, particularly as observers, at IMO and ILO.

Second, we can prepare a “call to action,” defining in plain language the goals and aspirations of the shipping industry: for example, responsibility for “the ship and her people” and what this entails.

Third, we can, by working with BIMCO, Intertanko, Intercargo and the other industry groups, help establish grass roots links to the industry's "human face" – it's seafarers.

Fourth, by promoting shipping's "human face," we engage the hearts and minds of the general public, particularly the young people who will, we hope, be attracted to careers at sea. We, as faith-based groups, have the global reach needed to help make this happen.

Let us, this week, take the first steps to restore "the people," as well as the ship, as respected partners, and to formulate a statement of positive goals and aspirations – a statement of social responsibility – for the maritime industry.

Thank you.