

28th Session of the International Maritime Organization Assembly

Remarks of Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr.

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It is truly an honor for me to be here this afternoon. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before this Assembly, and look forward to working with all of you as we address our common challenges and advance our common goals. I'd like to offer my special thanks to Secretary General Sekimizu for his leadership in all that the International Maritime Organization does, particularly in these trying economic times that all nations face.

I have long believed that the greatness of a maritime nation can be measured by the resources it provides to mariners for the safe, secure, and environmentally sound approaches to its shores. I have called these activities "maritime governance". I applaud the IMO for its longstanding commitment to normalizing and enhancing maritime governance around the globe.

One area in particular that deserves our collective attention is the Arctic. The Arctic Ocean is rapidly changing from a solid expanse of inaccessible ice fields into a growing navigable sea, attracting increased human activity and unlocking access to vast economic potential and energy resources.

The acceleration of human activity, the opening of the seas, and the inevitable increase in maritime activity mean increased risk of maritime accidents, including those involving cruise ships; oil spills; illegal fishing and harvesting of other natural resources. These growing risks—inevitable with growth of human activity—demand our attention and commitment to meet our responsibilities to those who use these waters.

Maritime governance begins with protocols and regimes. A critical task before us is to complete the drafting and then adopt the IMO Polar Code. Adopting clear standards for ship and equipment design, vessel carriage requirements, and appropriate operation and manning standards will help ensure the safety of mariners, passengers, and cargo. Most importantly, it will help prevent the need for what would certainly be a difficult and lengthy response should a casualty occur, thus saving lives and protecting our environment.

Adopting the Code's environmental provisions will ensure that these waters and the resources they contain are cared for and preserved in a manner that benefits all nations.

While all issues raised by member states may not be adopted, there is much common ground, and completion of this initiative is critical. I appreciate the strong efforts now underway, and know there are many who are diligently working and engaged with a host of government, industry and non-governmental organizations.

While adventure tourism and the increase in passenger ships is a growing concern in Arctic waters, it is not an issue limited to that part of the world. Increasingly larger passenger ships transiting more remote areas in every corner of the globe necessarily entails increasingly larger risk.

The continued increase in the size of passenger carrying vessels, the accompanying growth and diversity in both passengers and crew, and expanded operations in increasingly remote locations demand that we continue to develop strong initiatives to increase passenger ship safety and survivability. I acknowledge the work currently being done and applaud the progress that has been made. It is through international efforts like this that we will continue to save lives by preventing future accidents.

We must also work together to continue to combat the problem of maritime crime and piracy. Thanks to the resolve by member states to continue naval support in the most affected regions, we have seen significant success in combating this age-old problem. However, the threat of piracy is increasing off the west coast of Africa, and pirates and other armed groups have refined their tactics. Sustaining the successes of the past will require coastal states to embrace the Code of Conduct signed in Cameroon last June. Those efforts must include both shore side and littoral coordination by states in the region; enforcing their sovereign rule of law; and building both capabilities and capacity with the support of the United Nations, the International Maritime Organization, and fellow central and western African nations.

Any real and lasting solution to this problem must also include greater effort by the owners and operators of vessels transiting these regions, including the development and use of Best Management Practices. All member states must ensure that vessels flying their flag take full account of the risks that exist and have the crew training and security measures in place to deter or defend against these attacks.

We must all join in a commitment to provide mariners safe and secure approaches to our shores. Our collective prosperity is proportionate to our efforts to ensure the safe, secure and efficient movement of trade and commerce. In doing so, we must also ensure the environmental protection of the sea. That's a common goal we all share.

More than ninety-five percent of global commerce is carried by sea. Well over one million seafarers serve on commercial ships and over two billion passengers' board ferries and cruise ships around the world. New energy exploration is planned in dozens of areas previously untouched by this activity. And a newly expanded Panama Canal, along with the opening of the Arctic Ocean, has the potential to alter worldwide shipping routes and bring an even greater number of increasingly larger ships to all of our ports.

Through the work done here at IMO, we help ensure adherence to a system of rules and sustain the mechanisms designed to provide for the security, safety and prosperity of all those who use the maritime domain. This noble work provides us all with both order and opportunity on the oceans. Wherever human activity thrives, we have a shared responsibility to uphold the rule of law; ensure the safety and security of mariners, passengers and cargo; and ensure environmentally responsible maritime activity. Each sovereign state, working together with the international community as a whole, must uphold these responsibilities to ensure legitimacy of the rule of law in a dynamic and challenging world. Maritime governance is the value that IMO and our member states bring today and promise for the future.

I look forward to collaborating with all of you in this endeavor. In doing so, we can be secure in the knowledge we are indeed directing our efforts towards a worthwhile purpose.