

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines ratify Maritime Labour Convention (MLC 2006)

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On 9 November 2010 the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines deposited its ratification of the [Maritime Labour Convention, 2006](#) (MLC, 2006) with the International Labour Office (ILO), making it the eleventh (11) maritime country to ratify. On the same occasion the Government deposited three other important ratifications: the [Employment Policy Convention, 1964 \(No. 122\)](#); the [Labour Inspection \(Agriculture\) Convention, 1969 \(No. 129\)](#), and the [Tripartite Consultation \(International Labour Standards\) Convention, 1976 \(No. 144\)](#).

Cleopatra Doumbia-Henry, Director of the International Labour Standards Department comments: “The leadership shown by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, one of the larger flag States, in steadily moving forward to take responsibility for helping secure decent work for the many seafarers working on its ships and for its seafarers is very welcome. Saint Vincent and Grenadines actively participated in a Hemisphere-wide MLC, 2006 conference in September 2009, and then followed up with a national legislative review. Only two weeks ago it participated in the ILO’s first regional training workshop for MLC, 2006 inspectors and port State control Officers that was hosted by the Maritime Authority of Jamaica and the Caribbean Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control supported by the Swedish International Development Agency. In my view it is especially important to see that these actions are combined with an affirmation of its commitment to national social dialogue, though ratification of Convention No. 144. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines stands out as the first country in the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean to have ratified all eight fundamental ILO Conventions and all four priority Conventions”.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, a multi-island country, has a long maritime tradition with over 2,600 ships with more than 17,500 seafarers engaged in international voyages. But it is also a home country for many of the world’s seafarers, with 3,200 Vincentians working on foreign ships worldwide.

This ratification marks another important step toward the entering into force of the new Convention, that is aimed at securing decent work for the world’s more than 1.2 million seafarers and at ensuring a “level playing-field” for quality shipowners. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines joins a group that includes the world’s four largest flag States: the Bahamas, Liberia, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Norway, Panama, and in 2010, countries with important maritime interests, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spain, Croatia, Bulgaria and Canada. The ratification now brings the ILO even closer to the goal of achieving the Convention’s demanding entry into force formula, which requires ratifications from at least 30 ILO member States with a total share of at least 33 per cent of world gross tonnage (GT). The tonnage requirement was exceeded in 2009 with ratifications by four major flag States. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines’ ratification brings the total to 48 per cent and means that when the MLC, 2006 enters into force it will already

apply to the seafarers on nearly 50 per cent of the world commercial shipping fleet (based on GT).

Aimed at protecting the world's 1.2 million or more seafarers, the MLC, 2006 addresses the evolving realities and needs of an industry that handles 90 per cent of international trade. It sets out a seafarers' "bill of rights" and is intended to be the "fourth pillar" in the international shipping regulation complementing major maritime Conventions of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) on environmental protection and ship safety and security. The MLC, 2006 sets minimum requirements for seafarers to work on a ship and contains provisions on almost every aspect of working life including minimum age, medical fitness, conditions of employment, repatriation, hours of work and rest, leave, wages, accommodation, recreational facilities, food and catering, medical care, occupational safety and health, access to onshore welfare facilities and social security. Importantly the MLC, 2006 establishes a strong compliance and enforcement mechanism based on flag State inspection of all ships and, for ships 500 GT and above engaged in international voyages or voyages from or between foreign ports. This is supported by port State inspection – port State control – of ships to ensure ongoing compliance between flag-State inspections. The Convention also contains provisions allowing it to keep in step with the needs of the industry and help secure universal application and enforcement.