

PIRACY AND ARMED ROBBERY AGAINST SHIPS IN WATERS OFF THE COAST OF SOMALIA

1. Whilst, during the latter part of 2006, there was a much-welcome significant drop in the number of acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships reported in waters off the coast of Somalia, there has, since the beginning of the current year, been a worrying increase in the number of reported incidents.

2. The hijacking of ships and demands for the payment of ransoms for their release and for the release of their crews and cargo appear to have become a common pattern, with the perpetrators having also been engaged in attacks on, and seizure of, ships carrying food aid to Somalia under the auspices of the United Nations World Food Programme.

3. Whilst most of the incidents have reportedly occurred at distances ranging up to 200 nautical miles off the Somali coast (suggesting a pattern of well organized and coordinated activities), there have also been cases of attacks that have taken place in Somalia's territorial sea. The actual extent of the incidents is very difficult to gauge and there may have been several other unreported cases.

4. In view of the situation, as described above, and the impact any act of piracy and armed robbery may have on human life, the safety of navigation and the environment, Member Governments and international organizations concerned are invited, as a matter of urgency, to bring this circular to the attention of shipowners, ship operators and managers, shipping companies, shipmasters and all other relevant parties advising them to take any action deemed appropriate in the circumstances and, in particular, to comply with the recommendations in:

.1 MSC/Circ.622/Rev.1 - Recommendations to Governments for preventing and suppressing piracy and armed robbery against ships; and

.2 MSC/Circ.623/Rev.3 - Guidance to shipowners and ship operators, shipmasters and crews on preventing and suppressing acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships,

noting that, as a result of IMO bringing the issue to the attention of the United Nations Security Council, its President, in a statement issued on 15 March 2006, included the following:

"The Security Council takes note of resolution A.979(24) adopted on 23 November 2005 at the twenty-fourth session of the International Maritime Organization biennial Assembly, concerning the increasing incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships in waters off the coast of Somalia. The Council encourages Member States whose naval vessels and military aircraft operate in international waters and airspace adjacent to the coast of Somalia to be vigilant to any incident of piracy therein and to take appropriate action to protect merchant shipping, in particular the transportation of humanitarian aid, against any such act, in line with relevant international law. ... The Council further urges co operation among all States, particularly regional States, and active prosecution of piracy offences."

5 This circular is issued following consultations between the Secretary-General and the Acting Chairman of the Maritime Safety Committee.