

International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) expresses concern at increasing attacks on ships crews

The number of ship's crewmembers being kidnapped in the Gulf of Guinea increased by more than 50% in 2019 and this year has begun with a further escalation of violence, armed robbery and kidnapping. The crisis is deepening - pirates are bolder and taking greater number of hostages. Levels of violence are high, and deaths have occurred both during attacks and during captivity of seafarers and military personnel. This is not business as usual. For example, 20 crewmembers were kidnapped from the MT Duke on 15 December last year with one of those crewmembers dying in captivity - this not acceptable.

Over 90% of global kidnappings reported at sea took place in the Gulf of Guinea. It remains an uncomfortable fact that the vast majority of attacks are launched on shipping from within Nigerian territorial waters. We recognise that Nigeria is improving its maritime security capability through programmes such as the Deep Blue Project and ICS applauds and encourages these measures. However, now is the time to see real results in terms of action at sea and in the capture and prosecution of pirates.

The International Community must respond to this threat to the lives and wellbeing of seafarers by supporting Nigeria in bringing a swift resolution to this intolerable situation. Practical and effective assistance should be provided to coastal States to improve their Maritime Security in a meaningful way, and Naval assets in the region need to be prepared to respond to piracy incidents.

Speaking after the ICS Board meeting held in London, Esben Poulsson, Chairman of the International Chamber of Shipping said: "Our absolute priority will always be the safety and welfare of the crew. We stand ready and willing to work in close partnership with the Government of Nigeria, and the international community to protect ships and their crews as they go about their legitimate business.

"Seafarers have the right to operate free from the fear of kidnap or capture. But improved security in the Gulf of Guinea will also boost Nigerian industry. There is an opportunity to pursue win-win cooperation.

"We welcome efforts of the Nigerian Navy to respond to reported incidents of piracy by dispatching patrol boats. However, the spike in incidents indicates in 2019 and this year has shown just how far away we are from solving this endemic issue.

"The declining rate of piracy incidents elsewhere reinforces the importance of communication and coordination between vessels and authorities. The more information national governments and relevant authorities have on piracy trends, the stronger piracy prevention efforts will be."

"The shipping industry is ready and willing to work with all parties to bring an end to this endemic blight to free trade."

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NOTES TO EDITORS: ICS is the principle international trade association for merchant shipowners and operators, representing all sectors and trades and over 80% of the worlds merchant fleet.