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UNSAFE MIXED MIGRATION BY SEA

Further international actions in response to the migrant crisis in the Central Mediterranean

Submitted by the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS)

SUMMARY

Executive summary: This document provides information on the increasing death toll of migrants attempting to reach Europe via the central Mediterranean. The Committee is invited to support further action by the Organization, in parallel with other UN specialized agencies, and to promote appropriate and effective action at the United Nations.

Strategic direction: 1.1

High-level action: 1.1.1, 1.1.2

Output: 1.1.2.1

Action to be taken: Paragraph 11

Related documents: MSC 97/22, paragraph 15.6

Background

1 The Maritime Safety Committee at its ninety-seventh session, taking into account that the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean region was far from being resolved, invited Member States and international organizations to submit comments and proposals on this issue to its next session, (MSC 97/22, paragraph 15.6). This document is submitted in response to that invitation.

Discussion

2 The purpose of this document is to highlight the unacceptable death toll amongst migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean by unsafe means provided by people smugglers. Whilst the concern is common to all areas of the Mediterranean affected by international migration flows, the focus of this document is on the particularly concerning situation in the central Mediterranean.

3 Despite the welcome increase in government funded resources and the activity of non-governmental organization vessels, the number of merchant ships involved in rescue operations has remained relatively constant since 2015 and the average number of persons rescued by each merchant ship remains over 110. In 2016, of a total of 381 merchant ships diverted, 121 ships were involved in the rescue of 13,888 people.

4 An analysis of figures available from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)¹ and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)² indicates that there has been no substantive reduction in the flow of people crossing the Mediterranean and illustrates the grave risks taken by migrants, including unaccompanied children, attempting to reach Europe from North Africa, by sea.

5 Based on data available from UNHCR and IOM for the central Mediterranean:

.1 in 2014 there were 170,100 arrivals by sea and an estimated 3,200 migrants reported dead or missing;

.2 in 2015 there were 153,846 arrivals by sea with 2,913 migrants reported dead or missing;

.3 in 2016 there were 181,436 arrivals by sea with 4,578 migrants reported dead or missing; and

.4 in January 2017 there were 4,467 arrivals by sea with 222 migrants reported dead or missing. The equivalent figures for January 2016 were 5,273 and 87 respectively.

6 Of particular concern is the upward trend in migrants reported dead or missing in 2015 and 2016 which, based on current leading indicators, can be expected to continue into 2017 and beyond. The increase in reported dead or missing (57%) between 2015 and 2016 is more than proportional to the increase in arrivals by sea (18%). This indicates that the situation in the central Mediterranean presents a significant challenge, even with the concerted search and rescue (SAR) efforts of Italy, merchant ships and non-governmental organizations, and the indirect efforts of vessels operating under the non-SAR mandates of Frontex and European Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR).

7 It is only too apparent that there is a need for further appropriate and effective international responses, beyond the provisions of UN Security Council resolution 2240(2015), at the highest level within the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

8 With these dreadful trends in mind, ICS has written to:

.1 the United Nations Secretary-General expressing concern with the situation in the Central Mediterranean, and re-iterating the need for an international response, including further consideration of a proposal for a United Nations administered Humanitarian Assistance Zone in the central Mediterranean; and

.2 the IMO Secretary-General, UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Director-General of IOM, inviting all three organizations to convene a further inter-agency summit and to work together to promote active UN engagement to resolve the situation in the Central Mediterranean.

¹ Data available from the UNHCR Operational Portal: Refugee Situations

² Data available from the IOM Missing Migrants Project

9 It is recognised that the mandate of this Committee and of the Organization is limited to the obligations on Member States and international shipping under UNCLOS, and the SOLAS and SAR Conventions. Notwithstanding this mandate, there should be scope for the Organization to express humanitarian concern over the continuing loss of life at sea and to promote and support appropriate and effective action at the United Nations.

10 It is not suggested that the Organization takes a unilateral leading role in addressing the crisis in the central Mediterranean. There are too many aspects which stretch across the mandates of other UN specialised agencies and therefore joint action is the only option to stimulate appropriate responses. In the case of this Organization it is imperative to ensure that there is no unintended consequence on SAR requirements; SAR is a short term response to those in danger at sea, it is not a long term policy solution. Equally, the immediate and long-term effects on seafarers, both physical and psychological, of mass rescue operations in the central Mediterranean cannot be overlooked.

Action requested of the Committee

11 The Committee is invited to note the information provided and take action as appropriate.
