

The best way to protect crews in the current situation of Anti-piracy measures

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寄件者: nacsn [nacsn@ms39.hinet.net]
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收件者: Undisclosed recipients (nacsn@ms39.hinet.net)
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報告各位長官：

This year, piracy finally reached the top of the industry' s agenda.
The British government has taken the bold step of making it possible
for ships to carry armed protection after accepting what many have always thought was inevitable:

that the best way to protect crews in the current situation is to embark properly-regulated, authorised,
trained, and equipped professional armed guards.

新聞一則如附加檔案供參。

Best wishes
全國船聯會
秘書長 許洪烈

Bob Hsu
Secretary General
NACS
中華民國輪船商業同業公會全國聯合會
(National Association of Chinese Shipowners)
台北市輪船商業同業公會
(Taipei Shipowners' Association)
Tel: 886-2-23111230 886-2-23110239
Fax: 886-2-23116924
E-mail address: nacsn@ms39.hinet.net
Website: www.nacs.org.tw

Even Santa needs seafarers...

Tuesday 20 December 2011, 16:47 by Revd Tom Heffer



Chaplains from **The Mission to Seafarers** provide vital post-trauma support to hostage crews and families.

Protecting the welfare of those who really deliver the goods must remain a priority

THERE is a natural tendency at this time of the year to start 'winding down'. The chaotic pace of the City gives way to a more convivial atmosphere, as colleagues put aside professional rivalries and toast a year of business accomplished. We tie up loose ends, complete our paperwork and generally enjoy the circuit of Christmas and New Year parties with colleagues, friends and family.

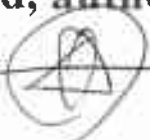
For many of the world's seafarers, however, this festive season will be spent thousands of miles from those they love. It is therefore good to know that, in 250 ports around the world, these 'absent friends' may find a Christmas lunch, a Christmas present, and a phone call home in one of our centres. The 'lying Angel' is truly a herald of the sailors' Christmas.

For the past year — and for immemorial hundreds of years before it — courageous merchant sailors have been the backbone of the world's economy, transporting much of our food, fuel and raw materials. They have weathered icy winds, raging tsunami waters, the chilly economic climate and, for some, the manmade terrors of piracy and armed robbery at sea.

This year, piracy finally reached the top of the industry's agenda,

after realisation dawned that the world can no longer tolerate seafarers and global trade being hijacked at gunpoint. When I sent an investigation team to the Indian Ocean in February, there were more than 700 seafarers held hostage; as I write today, there are 172.

We have witnessed governments and industry leaders getting behind the International Maritime Organization's theme of joining together against this threat. **The British government has taken the bold step of making it possible for ships to carry armed protection after accepting what many have always thought was inevitable: that the best way to protect crews in the current situation is to embark properly-regulated, authorised, trained, and equipped professional armed guards.**



See so many key players in the industry now publicly standing up to share our belief that the most precious 'cargo' on board any vessel is its crew.

This year has seen a broad group uniting to launch the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response programme, and many of us have also contributed to getting the vital fourth edition of Best Management Practice out to the ships. Even in the continuing downturn, it is inspiring to see the shipping community putting seafarer welfare higher up the agenda.

But as we tuck into our turkey, it is a sobering thought, that, half a world away there are seafarers not knowing if they will see tomorrow, let alone return to their families. Constantly under the fear of death hostages experience deprivation, cruelty, traumatic stress and even torture, while they cling to the hope their companies are negotiating for their freedom.

For our part, chaplains from The Mission to Seafarers have this year provided vital post-trauma support to many crews and families who have found themselves victims of this terror. But we still hear from crews too frightened to talk publicly about what has happened to them for fear of company retribution or blacklisting.

This has to stop. Shipowners might think it bad for business if they advertise that their ships have fallen prey to piracy, but it is equally bad business to get a reputation for failing to address the emotional aftermath that such an attack may have upon their staff.

In short, there is still much more to do.

I wrote in this newspaper earlier this year: "They are your ships, your commercial ventures and your crews. And that means their [seafarers'] safety is ultimately your responsibility."

As we reach the last days of this 'anti-piracy year', there must be no winding down of the government and industry effort to protect seafarers. As we set course for the new agendas of 'Titanic 100', we must still intensify and carry forward the work of 'Orchestrating the Response'.

Christmas doesn't grow on trees or arrive on a plate. Seafarers bring it, just as they transport more than 95% of everything the world eats, wears, drives or uses, day in day out. Seafarers really deliver the goods — and so must we.

As we enjoy the good cheer with our friends and families, let us pause for a beat and raise a reflective glass to the seafarer hostages who are not only someone's fathers, brothers, sons but all our Absent Friends.

On behalf of the Mission, I thank everyone who so generously supports us in supporting them — whether it is Christmas or not.

Revd Tom Heffer is the secretary-general of the Mission to Seafarers