
NAUTICAL INSTITUTE - SEAFARERS WELFARE INITIATIVE

During a meeting of the NI committee, the topic of enhancing support for seafarers was discussed. Subsequently, our attention was drawn to a press release in which the ITF criticized a certain flag state for deregistering several vessels at Khorfakkan anchorage without regard for the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) knowing UAE is not a signatory or the well-being of the seafarers on board.

Responding promptly, the committee at the Nautical Institute UAE Branch initiated proactive measures. We gathered information, including details about the vessels, their owners, agents, and directly contacted the Masters. Our primary objective was to assess how we could aid the seafarers affected by the deregistration. To address the issue, we engaged with the Federal Transport Authority (FTA), ensuring that they were informed and in communication with the Masters of these vessels.

Throughout the process, we closely monitored the situation, paying particular attention to medical health provisions and other essential needs on board. Our commitment to ensuring the welfare of seafarers guided our actions during this challenging circumstance.

On Wednesday, November 22, 2023, the Head of Compliance from the Nautical Institute committee, and the Head of Seafarers' Welfare along Ashraf Elbakri, Senior Associate from HFW, undertook a trip to Khorfakkan where they met with the Director of Ports to receive an update, which proved to be reassuring.

The Director of Ports conveyed that the two vessels in question had been officially declared as wrecks and are scheduled for sale through an auction. Notably, the Federal Transport Authority (FTA) will disburse four months' wages to the crew, and they will also receive compensation for their repatriation, marking a significant positive outcome for the seafarers.

Assurances were provided regarding the adequacy of provisions, water supply, and bunkers. The vessels are set to be brought onshore for discharge on November 28, and a skeleton crew will be retained on board until the auction process concludes. Our committee is committed to visiting the crew to ensure that essential amenities, including connectivity with their families, are available to them.

One of our committee members' agencies has taken charge of handling cargo operations and coordinating with the owners' appointed agency. This is being done in close collaboration with the Ministry, FTA, Port Authorities, and the vessels involved. All necessary permissions for the release and transfer of Dangerous cargoes have been successfully obtained, demonstrating a thorough and coordinated approach to managing the situation.

The Nautical Institute Committee is committed to monitoring the situation until the last crew member on both vessels has received their wages and has been safely repatriated to their home country.

Last week, the Nautical Institute Honorary Secretary has reached out to the Indian Welfare to Seafarers in Distress organization to expedite the disbursement of crew salaries as an interim measure.

Additionally, in recognition of the potential mental health impact on the crew members, the Nautical Institute has established contact with a qualified psychologist.

Actions initiated with DGS and MEA

Actions have been initiated in coordination with the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). While DGS was aware of the case, they were not informed of the present scenario, and we have provided them with a comprehensive update.

A virtual meeting was convened on Monday with the Deputy Director General (DDG) in Mumbai to explore ways in which assistance can be extended to the affected crew regarding their wages. Currently, there is no provision within the Seafarers Welfare Fund to address the situation of abandoned seafarers. However, given the circumstances, it is hoped that the incoming Director General (DG) may consider alternative measures to alleviate the situation.

Presently, the vessel is awaiting auction to be finalized and the Nautical Institute UAE Branch committee is watching this space carefully.

Capt. Zarir Irani, FNI, MBA

Honorary Secretary – Nautical Institute UAE Branch

info@nautinstae.com