Circular Letter No. 4222
18 March 2020

To: All IMO Members
United Nations and specialized agencies
Intergovernmental organizations
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status
Liberation movements

Subject: Communication by the Chair of the IMO Council

The Chair of the IMO Council has issued the attached letter to the Members of the IMO Council. He has requested that it be circulated throughout the Organization to inform those who may wish to participate as observers, as described therein.

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18 March 2020

Dear Member of the Council,

**Extraordinary Session of the Council: Actions Required as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

As you well know, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions to many organizations, including IMO. On 16 March 2020, I received the annexed letter from the Secretary-General. In the letter, the Secretary-General outlines the urgent actions he has taken to protect health and safety at IMO, while ensuring the continuity of operations to the greatest extent possible. I commend the Secretary-General and the Secretariat staff for their sound judgement and swift execution of necessary measures.

In his letter, the Secretary-General outlines the measures taken to date. He also asks that the Council, acting as the Assembly pursuant to Article 26 of the IMO Convention, endorse the urgent actions taken thus far, and also endorse subsequent steps that may be necessary in the immediate future. In my view as Chair, this appears to be an appropriate measure for the Council to consider.

I concur with the Secretary-General that a live, extraordinary session of the Council is not feasible at this time, nor is a session held by telephone or video conference. Therefore, I am proposing that the Council hold its thirty-first Extraordinary Session by correspondence. If the Council agrees, I would further propose that the Council indicate their views on the questions presented below. Once I have gathered all views submitted, I will sum up by correspondence, for a final decision.

The Council, acting as the Assembly, is requested to:

1. decide to hold the thirty-first Extraordinary Session of the Council by correspondence. Members submitting response correspondence will considered as "present" within the meaning of Rule 31(b) of the Rules of Procedure of the Council;

2. endorse the urgent determinations and actions of the Secretary-General in responding to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as described in his letter of 13 March 2020, and commend the Secretary-General and the Secretariat staff for their sound judgement and swift execution of necessary measures;

3. endorse future, similar determinations and actions of the Secretary-General to respond to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as appropriate, to ensure public safety and the continuity of operations of the Organization;

4. decide to convene the thirty-second Extraordinary Session of the Council, by correspondence, to approve the revised schedule of meetings postponed as a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic;
.5 request the Secretary-General provide a preliminary analysis of the budgetary impact of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic to the thirty-second Extraordinary Session of the Council, by correspondence, while acknowledging that the Secretary-General will endeavour to effect the maximum economies in the budget; and

.6 request the Secretary-General provide a final report on the impacts of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Organization to the 124th Session of the Council, as a separate agenda item.

Council Members responding to this correspondence should submit their views, in writing to Council@imo.org, no later than Wednesday, 1 April 2020. IMO Member States that are not Members of the Council may also submit views in the same manner, as observers. Any correspondence submitted should be signed by a person authorized to issue credentials pursuant to Rule 9 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council. In this exceptional circumstance, electronic signatures will be accepted.

As per normal practice at live sessions of the Council, Members not submitting views on the issues raised will be assumed as concurring in the decisions taken.

Thank you for your forbearance and understanding in this unique and unprecedented situation. Extraordinary circumstances demand extraordinary measures. IMO, in its long history, has proven itself to be up to that task, and will again now.

Sincerely,

Zhang Xiaojie
Chair
IMO Council
12 March 2020

Mr. Xiaojie Zhang
Chair of the IMO Council
Department of International Cooperation
Ministry of Transport
11 Jianguomennei Avenue
Beijing 100736
China

Dear Mr. Chair

Extraordinary Session of the Council: Actions Required as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic

I have been closely monitoring developments of the impact of COVID-19 at local and global levels, and have established a Senior Emergency Management Team and a Crisis Operations Group to develop action plans for the Organization to respond to the rapidly evolving situation. We have followed the advice provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Government of the United Kingdom (as the host government) and actions taken by other UN agencies.

Taking into account the rapid increase of cases worldwide; the continuing difficulties for some delegates from IMO Member States travelling from abroad to attend IMO meetings; and the determination by the WHO that the outbreak is now a pandemic, I made the following determinations, as a matter of urgent necessity:

Postponement, until further notice, of:

- the joint session of the Scientific Group of the London Convention and London Protocol (LC/SG and LP/SG) scheduled to take place from 9 to 13 March 2020;
- the 107th session of the Legal Committee (LEG), scheduled to take place from 16 to 20 March 2020;
- the seventh meeting of the Intersessional Working Group on Reduction of GHG Emissions from Ships (ISWG-GHG), scheduled to take place from 23 to 27 March 2020;
- the thirty-third meeting of the Editorial & Technical (E&T) Group (IMSBC), scheduled to take place from 23 to 27 March 2020; and
- the seventy-fifth session of the Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC), scheduled to take place from 30 March to 3 April 2020.
Further, to best protect delegates and staff, I have taken the following additional actions:

- instituting "work from home" policies for those staff members who may be at high-risk owing to pregnancy or underlying medical conditions;
- extending flexible working arrangements for staff to the greatest extent possible;
- cancelling all group visits and other external events at IMO HQ until 15 April;
- discouraging delegates from entering the building for meetings where phone calls, emails or video conferences would suffice; and
- closure of the IMOHQ building from 12-16 March 2020, in order to conduct a deep cleaning of the building after it was discovered that a person who had been in the building later was diagnosed with COVID-19, her symptoms appearing after she had left the premises.

I have taken the above actions and others in my capacity as Secretary-General and will continue to do so as a matter of public safety, while ensuring that the work of the Organization continues to the greatest extent possible, while also adjusting to respond to this dynamic situation.

The determinations made thus far will have both scheduling and budgetary implications. I expect more such determinations will be required in the coming days and weeks. Therefore, I believe it is prudent for me to gain the Council's endorsement, acting as the Assembly pursuant to Article 26 of the IMO Convention, of the actions taken thus far, and those that may be necessary in the future, until the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic abates.

As I discussed in a meeting held on 6 March 2020 with numerous Member States after the conclusion of the seventh session of the Sub-Committee on Ships Systems and Equipment, it is, as a practical matter, impossible to conduct a live extraordinary session of the Council at this time. The inability of many delegates to travel, and the fact that the Organization does not have the capability at this time to conduct full meetings by video or telephone conference, limits the options available. Thus, I propose that the Council could conduct its work regarding the COVID-19 outbreak by correspondence. For the purposes of Rule 31(b) of the Rules of Procedure of the Council, a "Member Present" would be considered as any Member participating in the negotiations by correspondence.

If you agree to this process, I respectfully suggest that you seek the endorsement of the Council on the actions I have taken thus far, and may need to take in the future. For your convenience, I have annexed a draft of the correspondence you may wish to send to all Members of the Council. The Secretariat can assist you in the production and distribution of this correspondence.

As a follow-on action, with respect to scheduling, and as discussed at the 6 March meeting with Member States, the Secretariat will work with the Chairs of all Committees and affected Sub-Committees to draft a revised schedule of meetings to account for the postponements. Once the Chairs concur, I will request an additional extraordinary session of the Council to address the follow-on scheduling and budgetary impacts to the Organization and seek the Council's approval on those matters. I will report on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Organization in full, as an agenda item for the 124th session of the Council, when it is held.

I greatly appreciate the continued support of you, the Members of the Council and all IMO Member States as we navigate this unprecedented situation.

Yours sincerely,

Kitack Lim
Secretary-General