



## World Maritime Day 2009

### Climate change: a challenge for IMO too!

#### A message from the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, Mr. Efthimios E. Mitropoulos

Despite the inertia that characterized initial reactions to early warnings concerning global warming and ocean acidification, it is encouraging that, albeit belatedly, we have now come to acknowledge that increased concentrations of greenhouse gases and the resulting increases in global temperatures are altering the complex web of systems that allow life to thrive on Earth: cloud cover, rainfall, wind patterns, sea levels and ocean currents, and the distribution of plant and animal species, are, to various degrees, all being affected.

Mankind is on the horns of a dilemma. For, whether we like it or not, our collective way of life has become unsustainable and we need to do something about it – and soon. The choices we have made about the way we lead our lives have been slowly eating away at the very support system that enables us to live and breathe. This cannot, and should not, go on. We need to make some tough decisions, we need to make them now and we need to act on them as one, with total and undivided commitment – today and in the future. Faced with facts we cannot argue against, we need to consider our priorities and accept that we have to make certain sacrifices; we need to start putting “life” ahead of “lifestyle”.

As a result of past and current emissions of what we now know to be “greenhouse gases”, climate change seems to have become inevitable. The climate does not respond immediately to external influences but, after 150 years of industrialization, global warming now has momentum and it will continue to affect the earth’s natural systems for hundreds of years, even if greenhouse gas emissions are reduced immediately and their levels in the atmosphere stop rising.

To introduce a maritime analogy, climate change is like a giant oil tanker, in that, to stop it, or even to alter its course, not only takes a massive force but also a considerable amount of time and distance – even though it only takes a light push on the right button on the engine panel or the autopilot to actually initiate the action of stopping or changing course. In the analogy, the oil tanker is the world going about its business as usual, the massive force would be the world community forcing world leaders to act, and the push on the right button would be Ministers and Heads of State acting decisively and in concert when they meet in Copenhagen in December of this year to agree on a new treaty instrument to combat, as a successor to the Kyoto Protocol, climate change.

At IMO, we are heavily and consistently engaged in the fight to protect and preserve our environment – both marine and atmospheric. Having, in 2008, achieved a breakthrough in our efforts to reduce air pollution from ships, we are now energetically pursuing the limitation and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from shipping operations – indeed, when considering which theme to choose for this year’s World Maritime Day, we unanimously opted for “Climate change: a challenge for IMO too!”, in recognition of the intense focus this topic is receiving within the Organization, especially this year.

Our work on this hugely important subject stems from the genuine concerns for the environment of our Member States and the industry organizations that help us make balanced decisions in the pursuit of the Organization's objectives – not to mention those entrusted to us under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol, which specifically provide that the limitation or reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases from ships should be pursued through IMO.

To that end, IMO has established an ambitious but achievable action plan and is now working towards the finalization of a robust regime that will regulate shipping at the global level and contribute to the deceleration of climate change. Much progress has been made by our Marine Environment Protection Committee on the development of an Energy Efficiency Design Index for new ships and a Ship Energy Management Plan for all ships (which includes guidance on best practices for fuel-efficient ship operations) and an Energy Efficiency Operational Indicator (which helps to determine the fuel efficiency of a ship).

All these efforts, together with a progress report on our discussions on potential market-based mechanisms, will result in a comprehensive package of measures that IMO will be able to convey to the Copenhagen Conference I mentioned previously.

Aside from the regulatory arena, which is IMO's main field of competence and responsibility, the shipping industry itself has made considerable progress, from a technical perspective, to address energy efficiency issues. A range of technologies is available that could reduce the emissions from new ships, per tonne/mile, by 15 to 25 per cent, depending on the ship type and size. Some of these are cost-effective in times of high oil prices, while others are not so. The challenge is to provide the industry with incentives to reward carbon efficiency beyond simple fuel-bill reduction and to correct any inefficient behaviour.

Since carbon emissions and fuel efficiency are directly linked – in simple terms, the less fuel burned, the smaller the volume of carbon emissions – the efforts to develop propulsion systems and propeller designs that can reduce fuel consumption by about 10 per cent, while delivering the same power output as their predecessors installed some ten years ago, should be duly recognized. Concurrent improvements in hydrodynamics and vessel hull design have also succeeded in reducing fuel consumption by between two and four per cent.

The complexity of shipping also serves to illustrate just how difficult it is to make the right choices in our desire to play our part in the world efforts to protect and preserve the planet. For example, some argue that reducing a ship's speed by 10 per cent will cut emissions, on average, by 20 per cent and, for some ships, by even 30 per cent; however, to then transport the same quantity of cargo in the same timeframe would mean using more ships – and the alternative would have obvious implications for a world accustomed to "just in time" delivery.

And larger ships, while offering undoubted economies of scale, will also have implications for port capacity and facilities, which would need to adjust accordingly – not to mention the knock-on effects of networks of "feeder services", using smaller ships, which would bring their own environmental concerns. The lesson in all this is that we need – before we rush to conclusions – to understand fully the net environmental benefits of all the initiatives, mechanisms and practices that aim at reducing climate change – not just in the shipping arena, but across the board. There should always be a holistic consideration of all the parameters – both positive and negative – of any solution proposed.

Climate change will, of course, affect everybody. No one can be immune to it. By the same token, responsibility for finding the solution cannot, realistically, be laid at the door of any particular country or group of countries, nor of any particular region or continent – neither should it be pursued through only one or a few human activities. We are, perhaps as never before, all in this **together**. Successfully addressing the climatic challenges facing us will be far from easy; but the consequences of failing to do so are far too dire to contemplate.

To achieve the desired goals in the fight against climate change, the solutions we will opt for need to be realistic, pragmatic, workable, cost-effective and, above all, well-balanced, implemented through mechanisms that are clear, practical, transparent, fraud-free and easy to administer. I know that there are difficult and complex issues involved, not just from the technical standpoint but from a political perspective too, as they have sensitive connotations, particularly for developing countries, and that is something we cannot ignore. If the solutions proposed are to be truly effective in combating climate change, they must be universally applied – and, for this to be achieved, there is a need for global involvement and endorsement by consensus.

In a speech to industry leaders in India in February of this year, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon accurately summed up the situation, when he said, “Industrialized countries bear a great deal of responsibility for the state of the planet today. And they must bear their share of the burden when it comes to paying for solutions. But, at the same time, countries, which did not contribute as much to global warming, still have a responsibility to address it. I don’t think this is the time for finger pointing.” Unquote.

Were I to paraphrase President Obama’s speech at the Cairo University on 4 June, this is how I would address those who represent industrialized countries and those who represent emerging economies and the developing world: “The two groups are not exclusive and need not be in disharmony with each other. Instead, they overlap and share common principles and objectives: for a safer, more secure and, certainly, cleaner, greener and healthier environment. Humbled by the task before us to do our duty towards our environment, I ask the IMO Members and industry organizations to endorse the belief that the interests we share as citizens of this planet are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart. All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart or whether we commit ourselves to an effort – a sustained effort – to find common ground and to focus on the future we seek for our children; whether to continue the controversy as to who is to blame for the state of the planet and who should take the first step or how we should all, **together**, use our gifts to halt the destruction of our common heritage and bequeath, to generations to come, a world we will be proud of.”

The message is clear: to succeed in combating climate change, we must work together and play our part with the seriousness that the circumstances demand. If the problem pays no heed to man-made borders, then neither can the solution. We all have a responsibility to take bold, comprehensive and coordinated action that not only jump-starts the recovery of the planet but also launches a new era of serious and meaningful engagement to prevent a crisis, like the one we are facing at present, from worsening or recurring. Working together, with a sense of responsibility for future generations, the agreements the Copenhagen Conference will be able to make later this year can have genuine and lasting value.

From the human perspective, difficult issues such as poverty, disease, uneven economic development and population growth are additional factors that serve to exacerbate and complicate the problem. Climate change and our response to the multi-faceted problems it represents has really become “the defining challenge of our age.” Let there be no doubt that, as the 2009 World Maritime Day theme proclaims, it is a challenge for IMO too and that we – Member States, international shipping and Secretariat – are fully engaged in helping to redress it.

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