

Introduction to IMO



Shipping is perhaps the most international of the world's industries, serving more than 90 per cent of global trade by carrying huge quantities of cargo cost effectively, cleanly and safely.

The ownership and management chain surrounding any ship can embrace many countries and ships spend their economic life moving between different jurisdictions, often far from the country of registry. There is, therefore, a need for international standards to regulate shipping - which can be adopted and accepted by all. The first maritime treaties date back to the 19th century. Later, the **Titanic** disaster of 1912 spawned the first international safety of life at sea - SOLAS - convention, still the most important treaty addressing maritime safety.

The Convention establishing the International Maritime Organization (IMO) was adopted in Geneva in 1948 and IMO first met in 1959. IMO's main task has been to develop and maintain a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping and its remit today includes safety, environmental concerns, legal matters, technical co-operation, maritime security and the efficiency of shipping.

A specialized agency of the United Nations with 167 Member States and three Associate Members, IMO is based in the United Kingdom with around 300 international staff.

IMO's specialized committees and sub-committees are the focus for the technical work to update existing legislation or develop and adopt new regulations, with meetings attended by maritime experts from Member Governments, together with those from interested intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

The result is a comprehensive body of international conventions, supported by hundreds of recommendations governing every facet of shipping. There are, firstly, measures aimed at the prevention of accidents, including standards for ship design, construction, equipment, operation and manning - key treaties include SOLAS, the MARPOL convention for the prevention of pollution by ships and the STCW convention on standards of training for seafarers.

Then there are measures which recognize that accidents do happen, including rules concerning distress and safety communications, the International Convention on Search and Rescue and the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation.

Thirdly, there are conventions which establish compensation and liability regimes - including the International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage, the convention establishing the International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage and the Athens Convention covering liability and compensation for passengers at sea.

Inspection and monitoring of compliance are the responsibility of member States, but the adoption of a Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme is expected to play a key role in enhancing implementation of IMO standards.

IMO has an extensive technical co-operation programme, which identifies needs among resource-shy Members and matches them to assistance, such as training. IMO has founded three advanced level maritime educational institutes in Malmö, Malta and Trieste.

Today, we live in a society which is supported by a global economy, which simply could not function if it were not for shipping. IMO plays a key role in ensuring that lives at sea are not put at risk and that the marine environment is not polluted by shipping - as summed up in IMO's mission statement: **Safe, Secure and Efficient Shipping on Clean Oceans.**

International memorial to seafarers



In September 2001 the international memorial to the world's seafarers, past, present and future, was unveiled at IMO headquarters. The memorial, a seven-metre high, ten-tonne bronze representation of the bow of a cargo ship with a lone seafarer on the deck, is the work of internationally renowned sculptor Michael Sandle. Its dramatic

configuration and massive scale have transformed the front of the IMO building and created a major new London landmark on the Thames riverfront.

Brief history of IMO

It has always been recognized that the best way of improving safety at sea is by developing international regulations that are followed by all shipping nations and from the mid-19th century onwards a number of such treaties were adopted. Several countries proposed that a permanent international body should be established to promote maritime safety more effectively, but it was not until the establishment of the United Nations

itself that these hopes were realized. In 1948 an international conference in Geneva adopted a convention formally establishing IMO (the original name was the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization, or IMCO, but the name was changed in 1982 to IMO).

The IMO Convention entered into force in 1958 and the new Organization met for the first time the following year.



The purposes of the Organization, as summarized by Article 1(a) of the Convention, are "to provide machinery for cooperation among Governments in the field of governmental regulation and practices relating to technical matters of all kinds affecting shipping engaged in international trade; to encourage and facilitate the general adoption of the highest practicable standards in matters concerning maritime safety, efficiency of navigation and prevention and control of marine pollution from ships". The Organization is also empowered to deal with administrative and legal matters related to these purposes.

IMO's first task was to adopt a new version of the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), the most important of all treaties dealing with maritime safety. This was achieved in 1960 and IMO then turned its attention to such matters as the facilitation of international maritime traffic, load lines and the carriage of dangerous goods, while the system of measuring the tonnage of ships was revised.

But although safety was and remains IMO's most important responsibility, a new problem began to emerge - pollution. The growth in the amount of oil being transported by sea and in the size of oil tankers was of particular concern and the **Torrey Canyon** disaster of 1967, in which 120,000 tonnes of oil was spilled, demonstrated the scale of the problem.

During the next few years IMO introduced a series of measures designed to prevent tanker accidents and to minimize their consequences. It also tackled the environmental threat caused by routine operations such as the cleaning of oil cargo tanks and the disposal of engine room wastes - in tonnage terms a bigger menace than accidental pollution.

The most important of all these measures was the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by the Protocol of 1978 relating thereto (MARPOL 73/78). It covers not only accidental and operational oil pollution but also pollution by chemicals, goods in packaged form, sewage, garbage and air pollution.

IMO was also given the task of establishing a system for providing compensation to those who had suffered financially as a result of pollution. Two treaties were adopted, in 1969 and 1971, which enabled victims of oil pollution to obtain compensation much more simply and quickly than had been possible before. Both treaties were amended in 1992, and again in 2000, to increase the limits of compensation payable to victims of pollution. A number of other legal conventions have been developed since, most of which concern liability and compensation issues.

Also in the 1970s a global search and rescue system was initiated, with the establishment of the International Mobile Satellite Organization (IMSO), which has greatly improved the provision of radio and other messages to ships.

The Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) was adopted in 1988 and began to be phased in from 1992. In February 1999, the GMDSS became fully operational, so that now a ship that is in distress anywhere in the world can be virtually guaranteed assistance, even if the ship's crew do not have time to radio for help, as the message will be transmitted automatically.

Two initiatives in the 1990s are especially important insofar as they relate to the human element in shipping. On 1 July 1998 the International Safety Management Code entered into force and became applicable to passenger ships, oil and chemical tankers, bulk carriers, gas carriers and cargo high speed craft of 500 gross tonnage and above. It became applicable to other cargo ships and mobile offshore drilling units of 500 gross tonnage and above from 1 July 2002.

On 1 February 1997, the 1995 amendments to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978 entered into force. They greatly improve seafarer standards and, for the first time, give IMO itself powers to check Government actions with Parties required to submit information to IMO regarding their compliance with the Convention.

New conventions relating to the marine environment were adopted in the early 2000s, including one on anti-fouling systems (AFS 2001) and ballast water management (BWM 2004).

The 2000s also saw a focus on maritime security, with the entry into force in July 2004 of a new, comprehensive security regime for international shipping, including the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code, made mandatory under amendments to SOLAS adopted in 2002.

In 2005, IMO adopted amendments to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts (SUA) Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation, 1988

and its related Protocol (the 2005 SUA Protocols), which amongst other things, introduce the right of a State Party desires to board a ship flying the flag of another State Party when the requesting Party has reasonable grounds to suspect that the ship or a person on board the ship is, has been, or is about to be involved in, the commission of an offence under the Convention.

As IMO instruments have entered into force and been implemented, developments in technology and/or lessons learned from accidents have led to changes and amendments being adopted.

The focus on implementation continues, with the technical co-operation programme a key strand of IMO's work.

Meanwhile, the first audits under the Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme were completed at the end of 2006.

What exactly is IMO?

The International Maritime Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations which is responsible for measures to improve the safety and security of international shipping and to prevent marine pollution from ships. It is also involved in legal matters, including liability and compensation issues and the facilitation of international maritime traffic. It was established by means of a Convention adopted under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva on 17 March 1948 and met for the first time in January 1959. It currently has 167 Member States. IMO's governing body is the Assembly which is made up of all 167 Member States and meets normally once every two years. It adopts the budget for the next biennium together with technical resolutions and recommendations prepared by subsidiary bodies during the previous two years. The Council acts as governing body in between Assembly sessions. It prepares the budget and work programme for the Assembly. The main technical work is carried out by the Maritime Safety, Marine Environment Protection, Legal, Technical Co-operation and Facilitation Committees and a number of sub-committees.

The IMO slogan sums up its objectives: **Safe, secure and efficient shipping on clean oceans.**

What does IMO do?

When IMO first began operations its chief concern was to develop international treaties and other legislation concerning safety and marine pollution prevention.

By the late 1970s, however, this work had been largely completed, though a number of important instruments were adopted in more recent years. IMO is now concentrating on keeping legislation up to date and ensuring

that it is ratified by as many countries as possible. This has been so successful that many Conventions now apply to more than 98% of world merchant shipping tonnage.

Currently the emphasis is on trying to ensure that these conventions and other treaties are properly implemented by the countries that have accepted them. The texts of conventions, codes and other instruments adopted by IMO can be purchased from IMO Publications.

The IMO strategic plan can be found in the **About** section.

Who is the Secretary-General of IMO?

The Secretary-General is Mr. Efthimios E. Mitropoulos (Greece).

Why do we need an international organization to look after shipping?

Because shipping is an international industry. If each nation developed its own safety legislation the result would be a maze of differing, often conflicting national laws. One nation, for example, might insist on lifeboats being made of steel and another of glass-reinforced plastic. Some nations might insist on very high safety standards while others might be more lax, acting as havens for sub-standard shipping.

How does IMO implement legislation?

It doesn't. IMO was established to *adopt* legislation. Governments are responsible for *implementing* it. When a Government accepts an IMO Convention it agrees to make it part of its own national law and to enforce it just like any other law. The problem is that some countries lack the expertise, experience and resources necessary to do this properly. Others perhaps put enforcement fairly low down their list of priorities.

With 167 Governments as Members IMO has plenty of teeth but some of them don't bite. The result is that serious casualty rates - probably the best way of seeing how effective Governments are at implementing legislation - vary enormously from flag to flag. The worst fleets have casualty rates that are a hundred times worse than those of the best.

IMO is concerned about this problem and in 1992 set up a special Sub-Committee on Flag State Implementation to improve the performance of Governments. Another way of raising standards is through port State control. The most important IMO conventions contain provisions for Governments to inspect foreign ships that visit their ports to ensure that they meet IMO standards. If they do not they can be detained until repairs are carried out. Experience has shown that this works best if countries join together to form regional port State control organizations.

IMO has encouraged this process and agreements have been signed covering Europe and the north Atlantic (Paris MOU); Asia and the Pacific

(Tokyo MOU); Latin America (Acuerdo de Viña del Mar); Caribbean (Caribbean MOU); West and Central Africa (Abuja MOU); the Black Sea region (Black Sea MOU); the Mediterranean (Mediterranean MOU); the Indian Ocean (Indian Ocean MOU) and the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC MoU (Riyadh MoU)).

IMO also has an extensive technical co-operation programme which concentrates on improving the ability of developing countries to help themselves. It concentrates on developing human resources through maritime training and similar activities.

IMO has adopted the Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme. The Audit Scheme is designed to help promote maritime safety and environmental protection by assessing how effectively Member States implement and enforce relevant IMO Convention standards, and by providing them with feedback and advice on their current performance.

What about the classification societies?

All ships must be surveyed in order to be issued certificates which establish their seaworthiness, type of ship, and so on and this is the responsibility of the flag State of the vessel. However, the flag State ("Administration") may "entrust the inspections and surveys either to surveyors nominated for the purpose or to organizations recognized by it" (SOLAS Chapter 1, regulation 6).

In practice these "recognized organizations" are often the classification societies.

The International Association of Classification Societies (IACS) is a Non-Governmental Organization which was granted Consultative Status with IMO in 1969.

What about pollution?

In 1954 a treaty was adopted dealing with oil pollution from ships. IMO took over responsibility for this treaty in 1959, but it was not until 1967, when the tanker *Torrey Canyon* ran aground off the coast of the United Kingdom and spilled more than 120,000 tons of oil into the sea, that the shipping world realized just how serious the pollution threat was. Until then many people had believed that the seas were big enough to cope with any pollution caused by human activity. Since then IMO has adopted a whole series of conventions covering prevention of marine pollution by ships, preparedness and response to incidents involving oil and hazardous and noxious substances, prevention of use of harmful anti-fouling systems and the international convention on ballast water management to prevent the spread of harmful aquatic organisms in ballast water.

The Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) deals with all

issues relating to marine environment protection as it relates to shipping.

Protecting the environment from shipping is not just about specific regulations preventing ships dumping oil, garbage or sewage. It is also about the improvements in safety - from mandatory traffic separation schemes to the International Safety Management (ISM) Code and improving seafarer training - which help to prevent accidents occurring.

The preservation of Special Areas and Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas is an important aspect of IMO's work. IMO adopts these areas - so that all Member States have an opportunity to view proposals and discuss any proposed measures, so that any which might impact on the freedom of navigation can be fully explored.

IMO's Technical Co-operation Programme is hugely important in ensuring Member States have the resources and expertise to implement IMO conventions relating to marine pollution prevention. Examples of programmes include: sensitivity mapping to identify which parts of a coastline are particularly vulnerable; training in oil spill response and contingency planning; the GloBallast project which is addressing ballast water management issues; and the Marine Electronic Highway in the Malacca Strait.

The IMO has a significant role to play in preserving the marine environment and ensuring that shipping does not have a negative impact. It is recognized that environmentally speaking in terms of energy needed for volume of cargo transported, shipping is one of the "greenest" transport methods.

Agenda 21, a global plan of action for sustainable development adopted by the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil included a number of target areas which IMO was addressing or needed to address and IMO reported its significant progress on these issues to the Johannesburg Summit 2002 - the United Nations' World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD).

Doesn't IMO always aim for the lowest common denominator?

IMO usually tries to act on a consensus basis. This is because it is important that measures adopted by the Organization, which can have a major impact on shipping, achieve as much support as possible. A treaty that was supported by only 51% of the IMO membership, for example, would be opposed by nearly half the shipping world. Not only would they not ratify the treaty concerned but they might go off and adopt an alternative treaty of their own, thereby dividing the maritime community. But this does not mean that the measures themselves are of a low standard. Governments that did not want high standards would not bother to join IMO. The Governments that do join IMO do so because they

support the Organization's aims. Experience has shown that the treaties adopted by IMO represent an extremely high standard and their acceptability can be shown by the fact that many of them are now almost universal in their coverage. SOLAS, for example, has been accepted by more than 156 countries and covers all but a fraction of the world merchant fleet.

How much does IMO cost?

IMO is a bargain. It is one of the smallest agencies in the United Nations system, both in terms of staff numbers (just 300 permanent staff) and budget. The total budget for the 2006-2007 biennium is £49,730,300. This compares with £46,194,900 for 2004-2005.

This is less than half what it would cost to buy a medium sized oil tanker and represents only a fraction of the cost of the damage caused by an oil spill, for example (the *Exxon Valdez* spill in Alaska in 1989 has so far cost more than US\$5 billion). If IMO is responsible for preventing just one oil tanker accident a year then it more than covers its cost.

The IMO budget is unique for another reason. Costs are shared between the 167 Member States primarily in proportion to the size of each one's fleet of merchant ships. The biggest fleets in the world are currently operated by Panama and Liberia and so they pay the biggest share of IMO's budget.

The top ten contributors for 2007 were assessed as follows (the figures show the amount payable in £s and as a percentage of the total budget):

1	Panama	4,418,927	18.75
2	Liberia	1,913,117	8.12
3	Bahamas	1,184,527	5.02
4	United Kingdom	1,123,294	4.76
5	Greece	977,960	4.15
6	Singapore	968,209	4.11
7	Marshall Islands	940,471	3.99
8	Japan	854,025	3.62
9	United States	802,196	3.40
10	China	787,462	3.34

IMO used to be called "the rich man's club". Has it changed at all?

When IMO began operations in 1959 shipping was still dominated by a relatively small number of countries, nearly all of them located in the northern hemisphere. IMO tended to reflect this. But as the balance of power in the shipping industry began to change so did IMO. The Maritime Safety Committee, the senior technical body, was thrown open to all Member States (previously it had consisted only of 16 Members elected by the governing Assembly). The Council, which acts as governing body in

between the two-yearly meetings of the Assembly, was increased in size from 18 to 24 Member States, then to 32 and in 2002 was increased still further to 40. This was done partly to take into account the growing membership of IMO, but also to ensure that the views of developing countries were properly represented. The biggest increase in Council membership has been to the section which takes geographical representation into account. In 1979 IMO became the first UN agency to make its Technical Co-operation Committee a permanent institution - an indication of the importance the Organization attaches to this subject.

Shouldn't IMO have some sort of police function?

It is sometimes said that IMO should have some sort of authority to enforce its regulations. This seems to imply the creation of a team of inspectors and a fleet of patrol boats crewed by officials with the right to board any ships they suspected of contravening IMO regulations. In practice, the creation of such a force would be financially enormous - it would mean recruiting hundreds, probably thousands of people - and politically impossible: most Governments would never agree to allow ships flying their flag to be boarded in international waters and any attempt to introduce a system of penalties and punishments would be even more unacceptable.

The "IMO" police force would duplicate the work being done already by individual Governments and there is no guarantee that it would make a significant impact on safety and pollution, certainly in relation to the cost involved. IMO has however been given the authority to vet the training, examination and certification procedures of Contracting Parties to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978. This was one of the most important changes made in the 1995 amendments to the Convention which entered into force on 1 February 1997. Governments have to provide relevant information to IMO's Maritime Safety Committee which judges whether or not the country concerned meets the requirements of the Convention.

What is the Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme?

IMO has now adopted the Voluntary IMO Member State Audit Scheme. The Audit Scheme is designed to help promote maritime safety and environmental protection by assessing how effectively Member States implement and enforce relevant IMO Convention standards, and by providing them with feedback and advice on their current performance.

Why is IMO so slow?

The main purpose of IMO is to adopt international treaties which are intended to apply to as many ships as possible. Unanimity of this kind inevitably takes time - it depends on the speed with which Governments act, as well as IMO - and it can only be achieved at all by ensuring that

the regulations adopted are very widely acceptable and this can take time.

But when speed is necessary IMO can act very rapidly indeed.

An example is the adoption in December 2002 of security measures - largely in response to the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States.

In December 2003, IMO revised the rules on oil tanker single-hull phase-out, in response to the *Prestige* incident of 2002.

In another example, following the *Estonia* disaster of September 1994, in which a passenger ro-ro ferry sank with the loss of more than 900 lives, the then Secretary-General of IMO, Mr. William A. O'Neil, called for a complete review of ro-ro safety to be carried out by a special panel of experts. The panel's report was considered by the Maritime Safety Committee in May 1995 and amendments to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), 1974 were adopted in November. Special requirements concerning the crews of ro-ro passenger ships were included in amendments to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978 that were adopted in July 1995. All of this was done before the final report into the disaster had been issued.

A further example is provided by the 1995 amendments to the STCW Convention as a whole. Although IMO agreed some years ago to amend the Convention, the timetable originally envisaged would have meant that this would not have taken place before 1998 and the amendments themselves would not have entered into force until the next century. In May 1993 the Secretary-General urged the Maritime Safety Committee that this process be accelerated by using special consultants. The Committee agreed and the amendment procedure - which amounted to a complete re-writing of the Convention - was completed by July 1995. As a result the amendments entered into force in February 1997 - more than a year before the amendment conference would have been held under the original timetable.

IMO has improved its procedures over the years to ensure that changes can be introduced more quickly.

One of the most successful of these has been the process known as "tacit acceptance" which has been included in most technical conventions adopted by IMO since the early 1970s. The normal procedure for adopting amendments to an international treaty is by means of "explicit acceptance." This means that the amendments enter into force so many months after being accepted by a specified number of Parties to the original Convention. The number can be as high as two-thirds and if the parent convention has been accepted by a large number of countries it

could mean 80 or more of them having to ratify the amendment before it becomes international law. Experience has shown that this can take decades to achieve - by which time the amendment itself is likely to be out of date. The tacit acceptance procedure means that amendments - which are nearly always adopted unanimously - enter into force on a set date unless they are specifically rejected by a specified number of countries.

Because of the care taken at IMO conferences to achieve unanimity very few rejections have ever been received and the entry into force period has been steadily reduced. In exceptional cases amendments can enter into force as little a year after being adopted. Apart from the speed, tacit acceptance also means that everyone involved knows exactly when an amendments will enter into force. Under the old system you never knew until the final acceptance was actually deposited with IMO.

Have shipping safety and the marine environment improved because of IMO?

Although we can say yes to this question with some confidence it is difficult to compare shipping today with that of thirty or forty years ago because of the great changes that have taken place in the industry during that period. In the 1950s shipping was dominated by a handful of traditional maritime countries. They built the ships, operated them, manned them - and provided the goods that were carried on them. Today most ships fly the flags of developing countries, their crews come from all over the world. Doubts have been expressed about the ability of some of these countries to maintain and operate ships to the high standards laid down in IMO regulations. Ships themselves have changed dramatically in size, speed and design and in addition economic factors mean that the average of ships today is much higher than it used to be. Despite these changes, safety standards around the world are generally good and have improved considerably since the late 1970s, when IMO treaties began to enter into force and the number of acceptances rose to record levels.

Statistics do not always tell the whole story. In the early 1980s, for example, a study carried out in the United Kingdom showed that the number of collisions between ships was much the same as it had been ten years before, indicating that the introduction of traffic separation schemes and other measures had not had much impact. But closer examination showed that the number of collisions had fallen dramatically in areas where IMO approved schemes had been adopted - but had risen by the same number in areas where nothing had been done. Generally speaking, the rate of serious casualties has not greatly changed during the last ten years or so. But in view of the changes taking place in shipping - notably the steady ageing of the world fleet over the last fifteen years or so - this is an indication that IMO measures are having an impact.

As far as pollution is concerned, the indications are that there has been a remarkable improvement in the amount of pollution caused by ships during the last two decades. This is partly due to the tightening of controls through IMO conventions such as the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973, as modified by the Protocol of 1978 relating thereto (MARPOL 73/78) and partly to the introduction of better methods of controlling the disposal of wastes. According to a study carried out by the United States National Academy of Sciences oil pollution from ships fell by about 60% during the 1980s, coinciding with the entry into force of MARPOL 73/78.

Whilst statistics have to be used with care, it should be noted that the incidence of large spills is relatively low; a very few large spills account for a high percentage of the oil spilt. Nevertheless, it is generally acknowledged that oil spills from shipping have decreased significantly over the last 30 years.

All of this is encouraging. But IMO is aware that a great deal more needs to be done to improve safety and prevent pollution. It is now concentrating on making sure that Governments and the industry implement the measures that have been adopted more effectively - and on reducing the number of accidents at sea which are caused by human error. Since some estimates say that mistakes make up around 80% of the total the scope for improvement is enormous.

What about maritime security?

Maritime security is now an integral part of IMO's responsibilities. A comprehensive security regime for international shipping entered into force on 1 July 2004.

The mandatory security measures, adopted in December 2002, include a number of amendments to the 1974 Safety of Life at Sea Convention (SOLAS), the most far-reaching of which enshrines the new International Ship and Port Facility Security Code (ISPS Code), which contains detailed security-related requirements for Governments, port authorities and shipping companies.

What is IMO doing about piracy?

Although piracy has existed almost as long as shipping and trade, it seemed by the end of the 19th century that it had been eliminated. Piracy came to be seen as an interesting historical problem, associated with the skull and crossbones flag, galleons of gold and villains carrying cutlasses: with a dash of excitement and even romance.

The fact that piracy was always a crime, often vicious and usually murderous, was forgotten or ignored. But piracy had not disappeared. During the 1970s and 1980s, attacks on merchant ships began to increase

and it became a problem that soon could no longer be ignored.

The Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), IMO's senior technical body, reviewed the situation in 1983 and the IMO Assembly in November that year adopted a resolution urging Governments to take "all measures necessary to prevent and suppress acts of piracy and armed robbery from ships in or adjacent to their waters, including strengthening of security measures." In April 1984, the MSC established "Piracy and armed robbery against ships" as a separate, fixed item in its work programme (many acts of violence against ships, especially those that occur in ports or territorial waters are not regarded as "piracy" under international law. They are therefore classified as "armed robbery".)

The MSC also agreed on the need for an indication of the scale of the problem via reports on piracy and armed robbery against ships submitted by Member Governments and international organizations. The reports, which include names and descriptions of ships attacked, position and time of attack, consequences to the crew, ship or cargo and actions taken by the crew and coastal authorities, are now circulated monthly, with quarterly and annual summaries.

IMO is implementing an anti-piracy project, a long-term project which began in 1998. Phase one consisted of a number of regional seminars and workshops attended by Government representatives from countries in piracy-infested areas of the world; while phase two consisted of a number of evaluation and assessment missions to different regions. IMO's aim has been to foster the development of regional agreements on implementation of counter piracy measures.

The Regional Co-operation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against ships in Asia (RECAAP), which was concluded in November 2004 by 16 countries in Asia, and includes the RECAAP Information Sharing Centre (ISC) for facilitating the sharing of piracy-related information, is a good example of successful regional co-operation which IMO seeks to replicate elsewhere.

More recently, a programme of sub-regional meetings was initiated to promote regional action to address piracy and armed robbery against ships in the wider context of maritime security. The first of these was held in Sana'a, Yemen in April 2005 for States in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden areas, with a follow-up event planned for Oman in January 2006. The Meeting on the Straits of Malacca and Singapore: Enhancing Safety, Security and Environmental Protection, held in Jakarta, Indonesia in September 2005 also addressed the issues of piracy and armed robbery against ships. Further initiatives under this programme are scheduled for the Caribbean, South Asia, Asia Pacific and West and Central Africa in

early 2006. Missions to follow up these events and meetings in other regions will commence later in the year.

How can I become a member of IMO?

Only a country can become a Member of IMO. IMO currently has 167 Member States.

Shipping and other interests are represented at IMO through Inter-Governmental Organizations (IGOs) which have concluded agreements of co-operation with IMO and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Consultative Status with IMO.

Individuals wishing to raise an issue at IMO should approach their national maritime administration or appropriate IGO or NGO.

How can I get a job at IMO?

Current vacancies are posted in the Working at IMO section.

What is technical co-operation?

The Technical Co-operation Programme is designed to assist Governments which lack the technical knowledge and resources that are needed to operate a shipping industry successfully. Any Member State can apply to IMO for assistance with specific projects.

What is the GMDSS?

The Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) is an integrated communications system using satellite and terrestrial radiocommunications to ensure that no matter where a ship is in distress, aid can be dispatched. Under the GMDSS, all passenger ships and all cargo ships over 300 gross tonnage on international voyages have to carry specified satellite and radiocommunications equipment, for sending and receiving distress alerts and maritime safety information, and for general communications. The GMDSS became fully effective from 1 February 1999.

Where can I obtain the text of the IMO conventions?

Texts of IMO Conventions can be purchased via the Publications section. Texts can also be found in national public libraries and in the libraries of maritime training institutes. On a trial basis, a number of texts are available to download at IMO Website.

For legal purposes, only the authentic texts and certified copies of Conventions and amendments should be used. Please note that texts of IMO Conventions found on external websites may not be up to date. You should also contact your national maritime Administration.

Conventions ratified by a Government are adopted into national legislation and the national version will be available through the usual channels (official bulletins, etc).

How can I contact IMO?

Individuals wishing to raise an issue at IMO, or wanting information on implementation of IMO instruments in their country or on their vessel, should approach their national maritime administration or appropriate IGO or NGO.

I am a student doing research - how can I find more information?

See the Information Resources section as well as the other sections of the website. The Site Index can help you find information on a specific subject while external search engines can also help.

While we will endeavour to answer specific queries we expect students to research thoroughly on the website before emailing IMO.

www.imo.org