

THE SEAFARING WORLD, PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES FOR AOS

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Cardinal Vegliò,
Archbishop Joseph,
distinguished colleagues and guests,

thank you for this opportunity to address the 23rd World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea. This is not my first visit to your Congress. I was with you 5 years ago in Gdynia, but although I have visited many countries during my career, this is my first time in Vatican City.

I have been asked to speak about “The Seafaring World, Perspectives and Challenges for the AOS.” In this regard I wear two hats. One as General Secretary of the ITF and a second as Secretary to the ITF Seafarers’ Trust, a grant making charity which provides funds for the spiritual, moral and physical benefit of seafarers and which has over many years done its best to support the good work of the Apostleship of the Sea.

The ITF groups together 708 unions representing more than 5 million workers in all branches of transport in 154 countries. We help organise many workers who come within the terms of the Pontifical Council, but we play a particularly key role for workers in the maritime sector and seafarers in particular (where our unions organise more than half the seafarers in the world), but also fishers, inland navigation crews and dockworkers. Our aviation secretary Gabriel Mocho was present here earlier this year discussing how we can help the work of airport chaplains who have an increasingly challenging role in dealing with migration.

The ITF Seafarers’ Trust celebrated its 30th anniversary this year. This charity is supported entirely by funds from the ITF. Over 30 years, it has given more than 150 million Euros to organisations working with seafarers in 550 ports in 106 different countries. We have invested a great deal into transport for seafarers and into buildings: seafarers centres which provide a ‘home away from home’. All of us involved in the welfare of seafarers have found that seafarers today have little time in port. This means that good cheap communications are vital for them, particularly wireless internet access and mobile phone, so that they can keep in touch with their families.

The Trust has made important investments in long term projects as part of a review of the strategy of the Trust. This has meant that funding for routine grants such as transport for seafarers, or support for seafarers centres is less available than before. Instead the Trust has concentrated on some major projects which are able to affect the lives of seafarers around the world.

Two of the most exciting major projects which the Trust has helped to fund you have already heard about. They are Seafarers Rights International (SRI), and Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme (MPHRP).

We came to the conclusion that seafarers' legal rights were very neglected in the maritime world and so we agreed to a proposal from Deirdre Fitzpatrick, the ITF Legal Officer, to establish a new organisation to address this need. This organisation is called Seafarers Rights International. It has now a wide degree of support from the most important people in the maritime sector and is dedicated to provide legal research materials and advice to ensure that seafarers of every nationality get access to their rights.

The second big project funded by the Trust concerns piracy, a subject which has brought the problems faced by seafarers to public attention for the first time in many years. Aware that seafarers and their families need effective assistance and counselling before, during and after pirate attacks. We helped to fund, together with the Teekay Foundation, the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme. This is chaired by Peter Swift, a long standing seafarers' friend, and managed by Roy Paul from the ITF Seafarers Trust.

And it is the ITF Seafarers' Trust which is most directly involved in the work of the remarkable body of people assembled here today. We recognise the key work you do as Port Chaplains and Bishop Promoters of the Apostleship of the Sea. Over the years we have made many grants to the AOS, both big ones and small ones, ranging from our biggest, for building and equipping the seafarers centre in Davao, in the Philippines; to our smallest, which was 500 euros for a computer in Montreal in 1998. In the future we will be spending less on centres and more on computers and telecommunications as we adapt to meet the changing needs of seafarers.

As money gets increasingly difficult to find, we all have to work more closely together to ensure that we get the maximum benefit to seafarers from every cent. This encourages ecumenical work for the churches, and for ITF also encourages us to make connections and work with others to achieve better results for the same funding. We work equally closely with the Mission to Seafarers, of which I am now a trustee, and with other Christian Missions, and welfare organisations, helping seafarers. We have long made it clear that the more closely organisations cooperate together, the easier it will be for us to provide some of the funding they need.

That's why we support the work done by the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA, of which AOS is an important member) and the International Committee for Seafarers' Welfare (ICSW) to carry out training and development for port chaplains in some of the poorest areas of the world. The training we have sponsored for port chaplains and welfare workers includes the Ship Visitors Training Course, a two day course on shipboard protocol which many of you have completed. We have also sponsored the courses being developed by the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme to assist those working with piracy victims. These courses, and others, are available to AOS chaplains and could be integrated into your in-house training.

The need for cooperation and closer working with other organisations helping seafarers is also the reason why it is important that the national councils of the AOS work very closely together with the Pontifical Council. You have some very dedicated people here, including my good friend Fr Bruno Ciceri. They understand both how the ITF and the Trust work. They also understand the vital importance for us of effective accounting information for the money we provide.

The ITF is proud to be associated with the Pontifical Council and I am very pleased to be here today. I suspect you do not have many trade union speakers in the Vatican City. That is a pity since in the end we share the same values as the Pontifical Council to care for the poor, the weak and the exploited, and to give them access to decent conditions.

In looking at perspectives and challenges for the AOS as the title of this presentation, there are three specific areas which I believe are particularly relevant. These are priorities for my organisation as well. I hope we can find ways to work together for the seafarers as we move forward on these challenges.

The first priority area is: Improving Life at Sea

Today we stand at a crossroads between the pursuit of the rights of seafarers and the pressures of a globalised world in recession. Seafarers today are working long and very unsocial hours.

As many of you know very well, the ITF has a dedicated group of inspectors in ports around the world who are there to defend seafarers. They visit ships, inspect labour conditions on board, and work to resolve complaints for seafarers. They are part of a three legged seafarer support community – unions, governments and welfare organisations including the AOS. When all the people who visit ships and talk to seafarers work together, the results for the seafarers are always better.

This year we have finally seen the 30th ratification of the ILO's Maritime Labour Convention 2006. I was very pleased that number 30 was the Philippines, the biggest supplier of seafaring labour and not one of our long list of Flag of Convenience countries. You will hear from Cleo Doumbia-Henry later this week. The MLC is her 'baby' and we helped to welcome it at a special dinner we gave for her in September.

By this time next year the convention will have come into force. It will provide a legal framework which will support the rights of seafarers in port and at sea which is widely ratified and accepted as a global standard. What do AOS and ITF both need to do about this? We all need to work, with our national counterparts, to make sure that the laws of each of the countries we represent are modified to reflect the requirements of the convention.

The MLC came about as a result of a consensus between key governments, working closely with shipowners and seafarers to eliminate substandard shipping. We and the shipowners are in favour of competition - provided it is fair competition. It does not mean employing seafarers who are not properly paid, using fraudulent certificates, or resorting to abandonment and not providing food, clean water and

medical attention. We and you want to see 'ships of shame' eliminated from the world's seas.

We need to find a new model of work with seafarers; a model that takes into account their reduced access to shore leave. Ports are getting bigger, new ports are distant from cities and far from the amenities which seafarers want to use. Small crews and short turn around times mean that both AoS and ITF face the same difficulties making contact with seafarers when they are in port. Security measures further reinforce this isolation. Yet there are times when ships are at anchor, waiting for orders; when the ships are waiting to load or discharge, and at these times seafarers are not so busy. At the ITF we believe that wireless internet is a vital tool for the seafarers calling in port, or at anchorage, and we all need to be active in promoting shipboard communication so that seafarers are less isolated. So please join us in asking the ports where you work to install wireless internet for seafarers to use so that even if they cannot leave the ship while it is in port, they can contact their families cheaply or free.

The life of seafarers is very special and they carry very heavy responsibilities. One of the toughest is the growing tendency to criminalise seafarers simply for doing their job. We see so many cases where seafarers (particularly the senior officers on board) are imprisoned in a foreign country because something went wrong on board ship and they were the easiest people to arrest. Dealing with this is one of the highest priorities for SRI.

It is important that the Catholic Church also works hard to bring to seafarers the benefits of the MLC and that you are willing to catalogue and highlight individual abuses of seafarers. We would very much like to see the Pontifical Council involved in the collection of data from cases which AOS has to deal with around the world so that you can demonstrate to others how seafarers are being abused, and help to enforce the benefits of the MLC for seafarers.

Tomorrow – 21st November – is World Fisheries Day and it is a good time to remember this group of workers and the difficulties, danger and deprivation that many of them face to put fish on our table. We need also to remember the excellent work that you as AoS do with fishers. Fishers have the most dangerous job in the world, and part of the danger is the terrible abuse which happens in some parts of this industry. There is an ILO convention for Fishers, but its implementation is much more distant than that of the MLC. This work with marginalised and abused workers needs much more devoted to it in terms of resources and work. The ITF has an active and hard working Fisheries section, but the size of the task is immense. Can the AOS and can the ITF rise to this challenge? I hope so.

Having spoken about Improving Life at Sea I will now move onto the second priority area for both the Trust and the AOS, and this is : Resourcing Services for Seafarers.

I am involved in giving grants to the AOS and to other maritime charities, and I know that the main issue is not the starting up of services for seafarers, but the continuation of these services to seafarers year after year, and the day to day costs and challenges in keeping services running.

We know the need for ship visiting. We know that on average according to our figures only two seafarers per ship manage to get ashore in any given port. We know first hand from ITF inspectors how difficult it can be to visit a ship, or even to gain access to a port. But we expect you to do this, and for all of those present here to be able to get in and out of ports, to be familiar with the ports in your country, to know what is provided for seafarers inside the port and what is not, and to be a constructive help to seafarers who visit your country. This is not easy, this is a major challenge for all of us, but it is essential.

We always like to hold up good models of work with seafarers and I want to mention here the work of the AOS in Great Britain. Some years ago they moved from ministry based in centres to a more mobile model of port chaplains and vehicles. This was a courageous move and we congratulate them for it. In case Great Britain is seen as an easy country to do this work, I would also like to mention the AoS in Colombia, where they have ship visiting in Cartagena, Buenaventura and Barranquilla , and they have worked hard to help seafarers in their ports over the last eight years with small centres and with active ship visiting. The Trust has partnered these efforts, and in both of these countries the AOS organisations, from the Bishop downwards, have worked closely with the trade unions in Britain and in Colombia to achieve a good result for seafarers coming to their ports. We thank all of you who have made such efforts in your own countries.

The question is how do these services get supported? Who will pay to make sure that the vehicles run, the ship visitors or chaplains get a salary or their expenses, that the wifi is available for seafarers to use, that equipment is renewed, rent is paid? There is a real need to deal with the financial sustainability of these vital services, and as many of you are here from countries where the visiting seafarers get much better paid than the port workers, there needs to be some justification for providing funds from the church for this activity as well as providing people to do it. We must spread the load.

The most important way to do this to establish a Port Welfare Committee and to establish a levy on the ships which visit your country. A Port Welfare Committee is an organisation recognised within ILO conventions which incorporates government, employers and unions, and also those active in seafarers welfare such as the AOS. These organisations are set up to facilitate welfare services to seafarers, and one way this can be done is to agree a port levy, which is a small amount of money paid by

each ship which calls in the port to pay for welfare services. Typically, this would be 10 to 20 Euros per ship call.

Another example of good work in this area is AOS in Italy. AOS Italy works both with our Italian ITF affiliates and with the Coastguard to ensure that in more than 20 Italian ports there is a method of support for seafarers who are abandoned, as well as a recognition of the need of chaplaincy services for seafarers. Here in Italy there is a National Welfare Board which provides financial resources for abandoned seafarers and also in some ports, support for welfare activities. In many countries this kind of support is offered, and if you do not have it, you should leave this conference resolved to get such a scheme introduced when you return to your country. AOS international headquarters are able to help you to do this, and even to put you in touch with countries which have managed to do it so you can follow their example.

As I already mentioned, funding is getting tighter and we all have to make sure it is being really well spent. If you expect any support from the ITF Trust (or from any other funder) you MUST be professional about dealing with money. Whatever the culture in your own country, you need to have strong transparent financial controls on all the funds you handle. You MUST provide detailed audited accounts for your income and expenditure. You MUST have a business plan which you can communicate to others, you must be ready with copies of receipts and accounts to justify the expenditure.

After the project has been completed the accountability process must continue. You MUST take care of the equipment or buildings bought and make sure that seafarers are always the focus of the activities we fund. We have had problems with this aspect with welfare agencies including the AOS in some places. If you don't deal with money correctly it will count against you when you want other grants.

It is vital for all of you to listen carefully to the AOS centrally. To be effective, while making use of local knowledge in each port, it is vital that projects are structured and monitored in the same way all over the world.

The third and final priority area for the Trust and AOS is: Meeting the Needs of Seafarers.

We have to focus on what seafarers really want and need. The world is changing, but some things remain the same. For seafarers their major concern is communication: with their family, their friends and with the outside world. The ship can be an isolating and lonely place, a mix of nationalities and cultures, a place of work and also a home.

We cannot go on doing things in the same way. We need to question what we do. I was very impressed by the way in which AOS Italy dealt with the Costa Concordia. Our affiliated union FIT-CISL praised the AOS in the way in which they supported the seafarers and passengers in need of help. The staff at Costa worked tirelessly to get the seafarers and passengers home, while all parties were appalled at the treatment of the incident in the Italian press. This was a clear situation of meeting the

needs of seafarers, in a big way. Fr Giacomo Martino came to present the story at the Trust welfare seminar in March this year, and we were all touched by his description.

Are we all ready to deal with this kind of need? Can you all say that AOS in your country could cope with something like this? When there is a major need on this scale where are you going to be when your help is needed? If you have a good answer for this, you will be taken seriously by the other agencies in the port. If you have no answer, you must find one or be marginalised.

I do not mean that you need a structure as comprehensive as AOS Italy in order to be useful. If you are one priest or ship visitor, with very limited resources, what can you do? You can mobilise the support of your church. You can work with the local trade union. You can visit ships. You can help seafarers to feel befriended in a strange country. Your contacts can help the seafarers. As ships agents do less and less for seafarers the needs are growing, they are not receding. Many of you here in this room are in this position and I know that you are making a difference.

You also need to attend to the spiritual needs of seafarers. Whether this takes the form of a talk with them individually about their family, or whether it is a Mass on board, you are able to meet these needs and are responsible for doing so. A survey the Trust conducted in 2007 with the Seafarers International Research Centre at Cardiff University recognised that for a seafarer, spiritual needs are as important as physical needs. Whether in terms of corporate worship or private prayer, whether Christian, Muslim or Hindu, appropriate and sensitive spiritual support was greatly appreciated.

The theme of this Congress is: “New Evangelization in the maritime world” (New ways and means to proclaim the Good News). The proclamation of the Good News is one of your duties, and this meets a need. The ITF and Trust are concentrating on the needs of seafarers as workers, essential for all of us in the world, and we have long seen the AOS as an effective partner in obtaining justice for seafarers, in providing pastoral and practical help to seafarers, as being people who bring what is good to seafarers and to their families. In terms of finding new ways and means to bring practical help to seafarers, you can count us as your partners.

Thank you.