

On behalf of the Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, Mr. Kitack Lim, I would like to thank and congratulate the World Maritime University and the University of Genoa for holding this important and timely Symposium on Migration by Sea.

Although the theme is Migration by Sea, it is important to recognize that we are seeking to address what is a global humanitarian crisis, not just a maritime issue.

IMO is the United Nations specialized agency with responsibility for maritime safety, maritime security, the efficiency of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution by ships. As such, we are responsible for a range of international legal instruments and comprehensive guidance and information resources, some of which are of relevance to the unsafe movement of mixed migrants by sea.

However, uncontrolled mixed migration by sea presents a range of challenges to the maritime sector, quite apart from the humanitarian considerations.

IMO Member States recognize that using the search and rescue system enshrined in the Safety of Life at Sea and Search and Rescue (SAR) Conventions to respond to mass mixed migration was neither foreseen nor intended. Using the search and rescue system and diverting merchant ships is not a viable solution to the migrant crisis.

Although Governments and the merchant shipping industry will continue rescue operations, safe, legal, alternative pathways to migration must be developed, including safe, organized migration by sea, if necessary.

As IMO represents probably the most international of industries, we fully understand that controlled, legal migration is essential to the sustainability of the global economy.

However, we strongly condemn the illegal people smugglers, the associated profiteers and the misery they cause, loading people onto clearly unsafe vessels. The ultimate solution lies in addressing “push” factors and that is not in IMO’s remit – although IMO has been working with other bodies and agencies (including UNHCR, IOM and UNODC) to promote a coordinated approach.

IMO therefore welcomed both United Nations Security Council Resolution 2240 (2015), adopted on 9 October 2015, and the EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015 - 2020) with their focus on countering and preventing migrant smuggling, partly by tackling smugglers and criminals; and taking wider action to address the root causes of the current situation and finding safe, legal ways for migration into the European Union. We also welcome the work being done by UNODC, INTERPOL and the national and regional law enforcement and border control agencies to identify, catch and prosecute such criminals.

As we are aware, mass mixed migration and, by extension, mass mixed migration by sea, are, like piracy, armed robbery against ships and violent extremism, symptoms of wider problems ashore. We are in no doubt that this is a massive humanitarian problem now, and needs to be addressed now.

People in distress at sea need to be rescued and I pay tribute to the search and rescue authorities, navies and coastguards, as well as the significant contribution of the hundreds of merchant ships diverted from going about their lawful occasions to rescue mixed migrants, with attendant risks to the seafarers concerned. We value the work of the International Chamber of Shipping and UNHCR to develop guidance to shipping on Rescue at Sea and Large Scale Rescue Operations at Sea.

But in the short term, the focus must be on managing migration so that people do not get placed into life threatening situations where they need to be rescued at sea. Processing of migrants and refugees in accordance with international law should take place in areas of safety ashore, with eligible persons brought forward in safe, properly equipped means of transport, including chartered passenger ferries.

As already stated, unsafe mixed migration by sea is a symptom of challenges ashore. These challenges need to be addressed and we cannot afford to just focus on the short-term – we need to address the root causes of and reduce the push factors.

What are these push factors? The population of sub-Saharan Africa will more than double by 2050. The ten countries with the youngest populations and the ten countries with the highest fertility rates are all in Africa. The GDPs of Sub-Saharan countries are not growing fast

enough to meet the demands of the increasing population. Food security is being threatened by unsustainable levels of fishing and climate change.

Youth unemployment is a major factor in promoting violent extremism, criminal activities including piracy, and drug abuse that leads to the breakdown of social cohesion. Add to this mix the instability caused by war and the pull of the 'haves' on the 'have nots', and you have a situation which, without joined up thinking and positive action, will not get better any time soon.

Although IMO's constituency, the civilian maritime sector, is challenged by unsafe mixed migration by sea, our long term strategy is focussed on creating conditions for increased employment, prosperity and stability through enhancing the maritime sector and sustainable blue economy in developing countries.

I therefore challenge this symposium to look beyond the here and now and to look at how the maritime sector and the other sectors and agencies represented here, can contribute to alleviating the root causes of unsafe mixed migration by sea.

Thank you.