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CIRCULAR

The situation in the Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden

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Notice to: Ship Owners/ Managers/ Operators / Surveyors/ Auditors

This circular is issued to advise that due to the ongoing conflict in Yemen, and recent geopolitical tensions in the area having increased since the start of the Israel-Gaza conflict, all vessels operating in the Southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are advised to exercise increased caution and vigilance.

The Houthi insurgents in Yemen have demonstrated their capability to disrupt maritime operations, and the threat of attacks against merchant vessels remains elevated. The entire Yemeni coastline is considered a high-risk area, and there is a general sea mine threat south of Hodeidah in the southern part of the Red Sea.

In Yemeni territorial waters, in the Red Sea, and Saudi territorial waters from the border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia and further north of Jazan, the security level is MARSEC level 2.

The current maritime security level in the Gulf of Aden is MARSEC level 1.

Several Flag States have already issued guidance and/or instructions on the subject, which should be followed by ships sailing under those particular Flags. Key points to note are:

- Make frequent checks with local sources of information, e.g. vessel's agent, to obtain the most up-to-date and reliable operational and security information available.
- Take all necessary precautions to ensure compliance with:
 - port authorities' current control measures, and
 - the safety of the vessel and its crew, including the vessel port clearance procedures.

- Clarify the status of a port's services well before arrival as the availability of cranes, fuel, manpower, etc. may be reduced.
- CSO and SSO should follow developments closely, using reliable sources
- Before entering any region where there has been an incident, or the threat has changed, a new ship- and voyage-specific threat risk assessment should be made, and the Ship's Security Plan reviewed.
- Whilst at anchor:
 - maintain a full and vigilant bridge watch;
 - implement Deck patrols;
 - implement a waterborne security patrol;
 - maintain a strict communications watch and establish communication with all vessels coming close;
 - ensure strict boarding controls are in place;
 - accommodation gangways or ladders should only be lowered when necessary;
 - rig outboard lighting where possible, particularly over the stern and use searchlights if available;
 - report any suspicious activity immediately to the port authorities;
 - monitor relevant VHF and other communication channels;
 - Ensure all fire-fighting equipment is readily available;
 - keep the Automatic Information System (AIS) on. The field stating the last or next port of call can be left empty.

Vessels anchored outside these areas should assess the risk of collateral damage and take all necessary precautions.

Port Entry Conditions

Special entry conditions still apply to vessels calling at Yemeni ports and it is advised to regularly confirm a port's status and condition with local sources of information.

Shipping companies, or owners shipping commercial goods or services, including bilateral assistance not channeled through a UN agency or a recognized international humanitarian organization, to ports not under the direct control of the Government of Yemen must obtain prior clearance from the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen (UNVIM).

Vessels calling at ports that are under the control of the Government of Yemen must continue to apply for entry permissions through the Yemeni Ministry of Transportation and follow the instructions provided by the local authorities.

Act now

All Ship Owners / Managers / Operators should ensure that the risks arising from the current situation have been thoroughly assessed and all appropriate security measures strictly enforced.

ISPS Auditors, when attending onboard, should pay particular attention to check that ships, having sailed in the aforementioned areas, have implemented all relevant measures in accordance with their Ship Security Plans.