8 October 2020

To: All Masters, Ship Security Officers, Company Security Officers of Hong Kong registered ships, Hong Kong Shipowners, Hong Kong Ship Managers and Hong Kong ship Operators

Ship Operators Security and Quality Advisory No. 63

Piracy and Armed Robbery Incidents Reported by Hong Kong Registered Ships in West Africa in 2020

In recent years, it is observed that there has been increasing amount of ships becoming targets of piracy and armed robbery in West Africa. In year 2020 (Up to September 2020), there were two (2) incident(s) of piracy and armed robbery in West Africa reported by Hong Kong registered ships. One (1) incident took place in port area and one (1) in international waters.

In the more seious case where the incident took place in international waters, several pirates with guns boarded the ship from a high-speed boat. It was reported that the bridge was damaged and cash was stolen. Before the pirates successfully boarded the ship, the Master had timely raised the Ship Security Alert System (SSAS) and evacuated the crew to citadel. No crew was injured in this incident. Such satisfactory security achievement was a result of proper security training and drills, and well executed contingency measures.

This advisory stresses the importance of paying particular attention and keep vigilant watch when ships are in these high-risk areas, particularly West Africa (including Gulf of Guinea), with reference to the necessary measures to be taken in those areas specified in the updated "Best Management Practices (BMP) West Africa".

Hong Kong Marine Department has issued Security and Quality Advisory No. 14 and No. 27 regarding carriage of security consultants, firearms and ammunition onboard Hong Kong registered ships.   The Marine Department encourages the carriage of experienced security consultants to assist the master and crew in the BMP requirements onboard in case of pirate attacks.

It is strongly recommended that Hong Kong registered ships should participate in Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade - Gulf of Guinea (MDAT-GOG) voluntary reporting scheme when transiting Gulf of Guinea.

In keeping abreast of the high risk of encountering piracy attacks in West Africa, this circular letter also aims to share the following lesson learnt from piracy-related incidents.   The likelihood of pirates to board the vessel can be reduced if the following preventive measures are taken:

- The provision of security escort vessel (SEV) service may be considered when transiting the high-risk area.   Sometimes, delay of SEV may occur. Close coordination with security provider should be maintained and level of vigilance should be heightened before the arrival of SEV.

- Keeping Anti-piracy watches in high-risk area for long time can result in a reduction in the the level of vigilance.   Watches should be rotated more frequently to prevent fatigue while witnessing pirates attempting to board the vessel.   If possible, watches should also be arranged to patrol at deck.

- Watchkeeping using short-range scanning of radar is an important tool of early detection of small targets.   Officers should be well trained to spotting targets continuously by using scanning ranges adequately. Night Vision Binoculars should be used when detecting small targets in a short range in the dark.

- As numerous incidents took place in port areas, level of vigilance for watchkeeping should not be reduced in such areas.

- Upon completion of loading, the vessel could be asked to move out of the terminal due to port operation.   A higher level of vigilance should be maintained if the vessel stop in a high-risk area without any protection.

Prompt reporting is extremely important for remedial measures to be taken locally and for the formulation and institution of more effective preventive measures in the regional and international level in terms of the fight of piracy. In addition to reporting all incidents of piracy and armed robbery on board your ships to the nearest Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) or port authority, Hong Kong registered ships are requested to report the incidents to Hong Kong Marine Department (Email: hkmrcc@mardep.gov.hk).

Yours faithfully,

No signature on website copy

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