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## **Statement in Support of The Recommended Framework of Protocols for Ensuring Safe Ship Crew Changes and Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The Flag States of Panama and Liberia join together to strongly support IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.14 for the “Recommended Framework of Protocols Ensuring Safe Ship Crew Changes and Travel During the COVID-19 Pandemic”.

Liberia and Panama support the careful facilitation of the world’s seafarers conducting safe crew changes. Both Panama and Liberia call upon other Flag States to join them in their support of these protocols and for adding their voice to this important call.

This protocol is a necessary and important step in ensuring the safety of the seafarers at sea, the goods they carry, and the environment in which they sail. Like most of the world, the COVID-19 Pandemic has brought about unimaginable disruption, and the seafarers at sea have been incredibly impacted by this. The challenges facing the shipping industry are numerous at this time, and this issue is amongst the most urgent in need of an international solution.

The seafarers at sea, who have been providing essential and uninterrupted global delivery of goods and materials, have been doing so non-stop, and well in excess of their normal time at sea and away from their families. International rules, regulations, and conventions have been extended to accommodate this need for seafarers to continue aboard, as they have been completely shut out from signing off due to lockdowns, travel restrictions, and the lack of ports willing to facilitate their rotations.

Liberia and Panama understand the important role that the Flag State plays, and will continue to play, in this process. Both Administrations commit to do what is necessary to ensure their seafarers have the proper documentation needed to board ships under their flag during the crew change processes. Further, they also commit to preventing delays in documenting these seafarers to help facilitate their seamless transition from shore to sea. These measures will go a long way in ensuring this roadmap is feasible, and successful.

Panama and Liberia are grateful for the support of the International community in their efforts to further the causes facing the world seafarers, and the work put into this by the IMO, ICS, ITF, and others. Both Flag States also call on the other major maritime Flag State Administrations to take action and join them in their support of this protocol for the facilitation of crew changes.

Panama and Liberia are the two largest Flag States in the world comprising of a combined fleet of over 12,000 vessels, accounting for almost 400 million Gross Tons, representing a large portion of the over 150,000 merchant seafarers at sea in need of crew change.

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