

70th National Assembly, FEDEPILOTI
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Speech by Kitack Lim, Secretary-General
International Maritime Organization

Ladies and gentlemen,

Firstly, I wish to congratulate FEDEPILOTI on its 70th anniversary. It is a pleasure to be with you today and to share some time with such an important part of the maritime industry.

Also, I wish to take the opportunity to express my sincere appreciation to the Italian government for the great effort and to commend it for the vast search and rescue operations that have taken place in order to assist numerous migrants in distress and save many lives.

These days, a great deal of attention is quite rightly focussed on technology as the solution for the challenges we face. But we must also never forget the human element, the people who have to use the new technologies and who have to exercise their own skills, experience and judgement in critical situations.

In the shipping world, that usually means seafarers. But it also means pilots. As local people who use their local knowledge to help ships navigate safely into and out of ports or through dangerous waters, pilots are a vital part of shipping's human element.

The tradition of using local pilots goes back centuries, but it is just as relevant today as it has ever been. In the modern era, pilots are a strong link in the structure that underpins the safety of international shipping. They bring their knowledge of local circumstances and procedures and provide effective communication with the shore and with services like tugs, often in the local language. Pilots are as familiar with ship safety and the life of seafarers as any other professionals within the maritime world.

Pilotage today is both organized and regulated. Indeed, the importance of employing qualified pilots in approaches to ports and other areas where specialized local knowledge is required was formally recognized by IMO in 1968, when the Organization adopted an Assembly resolution on pilotage, recommending that Governments organize pilotage services where they would be likely to prove more effective than other measures and to define the ships and classes of ships for which employment of a pilot would be mandatory.

As the only really cost-effective way to transport the vast majority of international trade, shipping will be central to sustainable global development and growth in the future. A safe, secure, clean and efficient international shipping industry is indispensable to the modern world. IMO is the specialized agency of the United Nations created by governments to develop and adopt a global regulatory regime for shipping that allows this to happen. Ladies and gentlemen, 2016 was another year of considerable progress on many key areas of IMO's work. Among the highlights were agreement on the date for a global reduction in the sulphur content of ships' fuel oil; adopting mandatory requirements for ships to collect and report data on the fuel they use, and approving a road map to develop a comprehensive strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from ships. 2016 saw important progress on verifying goal-based construction standards for new oil tankers and bulk carriers, and was also the year when ratifications of the Ballast Water Management Convention triggered the entry into force of that important instrument later this year.

If properly implemented and built upon, all these measures will have a considerable positive effect on the environment, the ocean and human health. And, as pilots, you will of course have to absorb their implications into your work, too – expanding your knowledge and understanding as you do so.

Looking ahead, in the future we will continue to pursue these goals, alongside the rest of our mandate. Traditional issues such as the human element, training and education will continue to develop but within new contexts such as enhanced digital connectivity, cyber security and the increasingly urgent search for green technologies. Again, developments such as these will inevitably have an impact on the day-to-day work of pilots, which makes the continued engagement of maritime pilots' associations in IMO's work even more important.

This year, I am particularly keen to highlight the importance of 'joined-up' maritime strategies across all sectors, and how this can bring great benefits in terms of development, especially in the context of the global Sustainable Development Goals.

With this in mind, IMO's theme for this year is "Connecting ships, ports and people" and we will be using it as an opportunity to highlight the value of integration in the maritime and logistics sectors – both from a policy and a practical perspective.

Pilots, of course, are an essential element in the interface between ships and ports and I hope that you, too will see your valuable work in this broader context.

The contribution made by pilots to maritime safety is well understood and clearly recognised by IMO and its member states. But we also recognise that the safety of pilots themselves is a vital issue.

Who else has such a difficult and challenging journey to work as a maritime pilot? As you know very well, pilots often have to spend several hours at sea in a cutter, before transferring into a small boat and then climbing from this small boat up the side of a huge ship on a ladder made of rope and wooden planks.

Boarding arrangements for pilots are clearly stipulated in SOLAS but we all know that, in reality, the required standards are not always in place. The Pilot Safety Survey undertaken by the International Maritime Pilots Association (IMPA) last year revealed a long list of defects and non-compliance levels of between 10 and 15 percent.

This is clearly not acceptable, and I hope that IMPA's campaign to bring this to the attention of Governments and the industry is successful. If the pilots look after the ships, then the ships must look after the pilots. Given the fact that so many accidents take place in the vicinity of ports – this is essential.

Ladies and gentlemen, it has often been said that pilots are at the top of the tree as navigation professionals, because not only do they always operate in high-risk areas such as port approaches, shallow or constricted waters and crowded shipping lanes, but they also have to apply their skills across the complete range of vessel types and sizes – from the largest and deepest tankers with their sensitive cargoes to slab-sided container ships and passenger vessels – with their equally important cargoes.

As such, pilots are an essential element in the maritime safety chain and will continue to be, long into the future.

I wish a successful conference, and thank you once again for the opportunity to be with you today.

Thank you.
