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Crew change: situation for seafarers continues to escalate

200,000 seafarers on ships meanwhile affected / worldwide supply situation in danger / urgent appeal to nations on the Day of the Seafarer: "Seafarers are key workers"

Two days before the international "Day of the Seafarer" to be celebrated worldwide next Thursday, the German Shipowners' Association (*Verband Deutscher Reeder – VDR*) makes an urgent appeal to nations that prohibit seafarers from boarding or disembarking from a vessel. "It is an untenable situation that crew changes still are not allowed anywhere close to an adequate degree. We are concerned about our seafarers, their health and about safety on the ships," said Alfred Hartmann, President of the VDR, adding: "If the situation doesn't change, then logistics chains will be disrupted because ships cannot sail on to their next destinations. This means that replenishment supplies, such as foodstuffs, commodities or medications, will be endangered for us all."

Over 1.2 million seafarers are currently in service on about 55,000 maritime ships worldwide. Normally 200,000 of them change each month as their period of service on board comes to an end. This system has now already been out of action for a quarter of a year due to the corona pandemic. After all, when a crew change takes place, the relevant port must allow seafarers to disembark from a ship. In addition, seafarers need to take a flight to their home countries from an airport located close to a port, and, lastly, the seafarers must be allowed to enter their home states. Conversely, replacement staff needs to be taken on board so that the ship in question can continue its journey. "In some ports, notably in Europe, Hong Kong or Singapore, this is now possible again," explains Hartmann. "But let's not allow us to be deceived: as always, successful crew changes are the exception and by far not the rule." Meanwhile 200,000 seafarers are waiting to be replaced on ships, and a further 200,000 are waiting onshore for their next mission on board.

According to the VDR, the maritime shipping sector has done everything in its power, with concerted action and also in co-operation with the trade unions. "Assisted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), we already gave states worldwide a detailed procedure to allow crew changes to be carried out safely even in corona times. This solution doesn't cost money and is simple to implement," said the VDR President, emphasising: "It's not the shipping companies that pose the problem, but the governments that do not implement these procedures. We urge them to finally lift travel restrictions and to allow crew changes to take place. Seafarers are key workers."

The seafarers' cause had recently witnessed a great deal of support. In a video message, Pope Francis had thanked seafarers for their service and willingness to make sacrifices, and UN Secretary-General António Guterres had expressed a warning about an "increasing humanitarian crisis". Heiko Maas, Germany's Minister for Foreign Affairs, assured the



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seafarers in a letter to the association of his help to have seafarers classified as systemically relevant not only in Germany: “We explicitly support the commitment of the EU Commission and the IMO to guarantee both their ships and crews the ability to work.” He indicated that Germany had requested its embassies “to contact the local government authorities and urge for an improvement in arrival and departure conditions in line with the recommendations from the IMO.”

In Germany, crew changes have already been generally possible for some weeks now. However, a current survey taken by the VDR amongst member companies revealed that over 5,000 seafarers worldwide are currently waiting to disembark from German maritime ships. In concluding, VDR President Hartmann said: “Seafarers perform an indispensable service for us all, by keeping us supplied with essentials. Giving them the opportunity to return home to their families is also a sign of appreciation of these people.”

About the German Shipowners' Association

The German Shipowners' Association (*Verband Deutscher Reeder, VDR*) is responsible for representing the common business and social policy interests of German shipping companies at federal and state government level as well as in relation to European and international bodies. The VDR was established in 1907, and in 1994 it merged with the Association of German Coastal Shipowners. With a membership of around 200, the VDR represents the majority of Germany's merchant fleet. Further particulars are available at www.reederverband.de.

Press photos of Alfred Hartmann: <https://www.reederverband.de/presse/pressefotos.html>

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