

PANAMA PARTICIPATES IN THE THIRD MEETING OF THE JOINT ACTION GROUP TO REVIEW THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON TRANSPORT WORKERS IN THE WORLD AND THE GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN (JAG-TSC).

The Republic of Panama, through the Panama Maritime Authority (AMP), was congratulated by the "Joint Action Group to review the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the world's transport workers and the global supply chain" (according to its acronym in English, JAG-TSC), led by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), in which the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Organization of International Civil Aviation (ICAO), plus the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), the International Organization for Road Transport (IRU) and the International Tennis Federation (ITF), are also members of the group.

During the third meeting of the JAG-TSC, held virtually, the Director of the General Directorate of Seafarers (DGGM), Captain Juan Maltez, participated on behalf of the AMP with the speech: *"The good practices of Panama with respect to seafarers and the pandemic"*. Panelists included ILO Sectoral Policy Department Director Alette van Leur, ICS Labor Affairs Director Natalie Shaw, IATA Director General of Policy Analysis James Wiltshire, Border Health Technical Officer of the WHO Health Emergencies Program, Sara Montes, Senior Specialist of Maritime Transport, Fisheries, Inland Waterways of the ILO, Brandt Wagner, who recognized the valuable performance carried out by Panama.

The conclusions of this working group will be presented at a meeting of directors of these organizations and also at a meeting of an ad hoc virtual inter-institutional working group of the United Nations (UN) on the impact of COVID-19 on seafarers.

Captain Juan Maltez's speech focused on 6 main points, in which the great work done by the Republic of Panama was highlighted, among them:

1- Provide humanitarian aid:

We demonstrated our solidarity in March 2020, when we were the first country to agree to provide humanitarian assistance to the Zaandam cruise ship, successfully managing in our waters the transfer of 401 asymptomatic passengers to its sister ship, the Rotterdam, without representing a risk to our population since it was carried out more than 8 miles from the mainland, strictly complying with biosafety protocols, becoming a decisive action that managed to save the lives of the passengers and crew of these ships.

In this operation, the delivery of supplies, medicines, medical equipment and other requested materials was also managed, in addition to the collaboration of the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) in the transit of these ships through the Canal, being assisted by Panamanian pilots.

2- Support and implement the guidelines published by United Nations agencies, one of the most important being the IMO's decision to designate seafarers as "essential workers".

Panama maintained a firm and positive position in reference to the guidelines of international organizations, which is of incalculable importance in order to face a crisis together, which is why, on May 12, 2020, we declared "Key Workers" to all seafarers under our flag, just as we support the "Joint Declaration on Giving Priority to Seafarers and Air Crews for COVID-19 Vaccination", the "Neptune Declaration on the Welfare of Seafarers and the Change of Crews" and the "ILO Resolution regarding vaccination against COVID-19 for Seafarers", among others.

3- Coordinate the work between the different Government and Private agencies, in order to guarantee crew changes.

Each State institution, articulated by the AMP, performed a specific task according to the function it performed, in order to execute crew changes through the implementation of the guidelines issued in IMO Circular Letter No. 4204 / Add. 14 for the Recommended Framework of Protocols that guarantee safe changes in the ship's crew and trips during the COVID-19 pandemic”, it details, through seven (7) different modalities, the safe ways to carry out repatriations and the crew changes and its objective is that passengers and crew members, including Panamanians, could return home safely, as well as embark, we also collaborate with shipping companies by providing Panamanian crew members who could easily board their ships from our ports.

4- Consult with representative organizations of shipowners and seafarers, when developing and implementing measures related to changes of crew of seafarers.

For the Republic of Panama, as ratifying State of the MLC; 2006, it is very important that the decisions made are consulted with the sectors involved, for which high-level meetings were held with the International Labor Organization (ILO), with the International Transport Workers' Federation, ITF and with the International Chamber of Shipping in order to inform them of all the actions carried out by our country, since last February 2020, to conduct crew changes generated by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and for the benefit of seafarers.

5- Implement vaccination programs against COVID-19.

With the support of the Ministry of Health, the Social Security Fund and the Expanded Immunization Program, since last year all seafarers on board ships belonging to the Panamanian Ship Registry, as well as registered with other flags, arriving at our ports, have been vaccinated. For this purpose, there have been around 300,000 doses of vaccines available.

6- Guarantee the protection of seafarers labor rights at all times.

It is important to add that despite the pandemic, Panama remained vigilant with respect to the application of the rights enshrined in the MLC, 2006, which were mostly affected by the crisis, in the same way, we have been attentive and ready to address the claims for wages due to our seafarers so that through our intervention, they can recover them.

During the last 37 months, the historical recovery of **USD\$13, 379,238.88** has been achieved in salary payments owed by shipowners to seafarers who sail on Panamanian-flagged vessels. The Panamanian Maritime Administration has a Department in charge of dealing exclusively with seafarers' labor complaints, which has made it possible to recover these owed wages. In the same way, all requests for repatriation of seafarers are attended without exception, which are in most cases linked to salary payment problems. In addition, during the last 37 months, shipowners executed 1,777 requests for the repatriation of seafarers on board their ships, as a result of our intervention.

Of the aforementioned record figure, USD\$7,660,455.55 corresponds only to year 2021, which represents an increase of 279% with respect to the closing of the year 2020, which had been USD\$2,021,691.29.

The good practices shown have been recognized internationally and we were congratulated by the Secretary General of the IMO and the Director of Mobility and Transport of the European Union. We also had the opportunity to share our experiences in both national and international forums, including the IMO, the United Nations (UN), the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Federation of Transport Workers, the International Chamber of Shipping, the International Maritime University of Panama (UMIP), the Mexico International ISPS Network, among others.