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Message of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for Sea Sunday

On the occasion of Sea Sunday, which falls this year on Sunday 9 July 2017, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has sent to chaplains, volunteers, friends and supporters of the Apostleship of the Sea a message of good wishes and gratitude for the work they carry out. In particular, the Message highlights the importance of protecting the rights of those who work in the sea, as expressed in the Maritime Labour Convention of 2006, and announces the 24th World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea, dedicated to fishing and fishermen, to be held in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, in October 2017.

This is the text of the Message, signed by the prefect, His Eminence Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson:

Message

Dear chaplains, volunteers, friends and supporters of the Apostleship of the Sea,

In our daily lives, we are surrounded by and use many objects and products that at some stage of their journey towards us have been transported on vessels. It is difficult for us to imagine behind these objects the faces of the many seafarers who have secured a smooth sailing for the vessel to deliver these commodities to the port safely.

On Sea Sunday we are invited to recognize and express our gratitude to this force of more than 1.5 million seafarers (the majority of them coming from developing countries), who with their hard work and sacrifices are making our life more comfortable by transporting, between nations and across the seven seas, almost 90 per cent of the goods.

Though their contribution is essential to the global world economy, many are the challenges experienced by these people and many are the difficulties affecting their life and dignity. Here, I would like to recall some:

In spite of the great progress in technology, which has improved communication between seafarers and their loved ones, the long months away from the family are still a huge sacrifice that often reflects negatively on family life. Mothers are left alone, forced to play multiple roles with children growing up with an absent father. It is important that in our pastoral ministry, we pay special attention to the families of seafarers by initiating and supporting the creation of seafarer's wives groups to provide mutual care and assistance.

The use of social media allows the crew to be connected with many people around the world, but disconnected and isolated from each other on board because everyone is isolated in the virtual world in which is seeking refuge during free moments. Our function especially during visits on board is to try to create a "human connection" and strengthen the "human communication" among crewmembers to prevent loneliness, isolation and depression that could lead to suicide which, according to a recent UK P&I Club research, is the top cause of seafarers' death.

Because of the increase of the threat of terrorism, new security measures are further restricting seafarers from going ashore in some ports, and sometimes even the access to the vessel on the part of welfare visitors. Notwithstanding that we understand the need of making the ports "a secure place" for people and the goods, on the other hand we must make sure that no one will be discriminated against and prevented to go ashore because of nationality, race or religion, and advocate for the fundamental right of the crews to *"have access to shore-based facilities and services to secure their health and well-being"* (MLC 2006, Title 4, Regulation 4,4).

In spite of the adoption and entry into force in August 2013 of the MLC 2006, which establishes the minimum international requirements of the human and labour right of seafarers, too many are still the cases of crews cheated out of their salary, exploited and abused in their work, unjustly criminalized for maritime accidents and abandoned in foreign ports. While it is our duty to provide all the necessary assistance and support to crews that are experiencing hardship and difficulties, on the other hand we would like to call on all the maritime authorities to be more vigilant and attentive in intervening to prevent abuses and redress any wrongdoing.

Even though the threat of piracy around maritime routes has decreased compared with a few years ago, the danger of armed attacks and hijackings is still very high in some geographical areas. We would like to invite the maritime community not to let down the guard and to implement all the necessary measures that will guarantee the safety and the protection not only of the cargo but most of all, of the crew.

Finally, I would like to focus our concerns on fishermen and fishing, which will be the focus of the XXIV World Congress which will be held in Kaohsiung – Taiwan this coming October.

Similar to seafarers, fishermen spend a long time at sea, often sail on fishing vessels that are not seaworthy, and their profession is considered one of the most dangerous in the world but they are entitled to lesser wages and benefits than those enjoyed by the seafarers. The fishing sector is plagued with cases of human trafficking and forced labour, and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.

During the Congress, with the assistance of qualified speakers, we will increase our awareness and attention to these particular issues; we will strengthen our network with the objective to increase cooperation between the Apostleship of the Sea of the different nations; we will share resources and best practices to develop specific skills, particularly in the fishing sector.

I renew my invitation that this Congress be attended not only by the experts, but also by the largest number of chaplains and volunteers, because fishing and fishermen are a concern of the Apostleship of the Sea and not only of those who are personally involved.

In conclusion, let us ask Mary, *Star of the Sea*, to sustain our service and dedication to seafarers, fishermen and their families and to protect all the people of the sea until they reach the "safe port" of heaven.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

Prefect
