



## Letter to the International Maritime Organization (IMO)

**Subject: Official international designation of de facto war zones as war zones - immediate protection of seafarers, who have been sent into the fires of war by murderous shipowner lawlessness and inherent state complicity.**

**To: Secretary-General and Members of the Council of the International Maritime Organization (IMO)**

We, the seafarers' organisations signing this letter, wish to express our deep concern and indignation regarding the escalation of the situation in the Arabian Sea, the Sea of Oman, the Gulf region (specifically the Strait of Hormuz) and the maritime region of Israel. This situation poses an immediate threat to the lives and safety of thousands of seafarers.

Data presented by the IMO Secretariat confirms the scale of the problem:

- Escalation of tensions in the Persian Gulf region.
- Attacks on merchant ships resulting in dead and injured seafarers.
- The inability to transit the Strait of Hormuz safely.
- Approximately 3,200 ships are trapped, with over 20,000 seafarers exposed to danger.

This situation is the result of intensifying imperialist rivalries in the region, as evidenced by the lethal attack by the US and Israel against Iran, which has turned international shipping into a theatre of military conflict, making seafarers victims.

Despite the gravity of the situation, we denounce the fact that shipping operations continue, shifting all the risk onto seafarers.

It is unacceptable:

- for ships to continue sailing through war zones and for seafarers' lives to be put at risk to ensure shipping companies' profitability.
- To require shipping companies to demand that seafarers declare, as a condition of employment, that they will not refuse to sail in areas affected by armed conflict.
- To require shipping companies to demand that seafarers sign a document a few days before arrival in affected areas, confirming that they have been informed about the voyage and are voluntarily risking their lives.

The measures that have been taken, as well as those being proposed, are limited to:

- calls for de-escalation;
- the exchange of information;
- recommendations for the implementation of international regulations (SOLAS, ISPS, BMP).

The above measures are insufficient in a situation where the crossing itself is dangerous and has already claimed human lives.

We demand that the International Maritime Organization (IMO), flag states and states in general, as well as employers:

1. Stop all ship transits through the de facto war zones.
2. Immediately recognize the area as a war zone, with full activation of the corresponding rights of seafarers.
3. Guarantee the right to refuse to sign on or transit through the area, without any repercussions for the seafarer.
4. Immediate repatriation of trapped crews, with responsibility falling on states and employers.
5. Full financial coverage and compensation for all seafarers who are or have been in danger zones.
6. Strengthening the protection of the life and health of seafarers, including mental health, communication, and supplies.
7. Mandatory briefing of crews before every voyage on the actual risks of the area.
8. No coercion may be imposed as a condition of employment, including the requirement to sign consent forms for sailing to war zones, which shifts the responsibility for the lives and safety of seafarers onto them.

We call on the IMO to take substantive action based on our demands, rather than limiting itself to recommendations that allow shipowners to continue their medieval and murderous practices. In the London freight market, these shipowners calculate and haggle over the lives of seafarers alongside the prices of oil and grain.

We urge seafarers' unions worldwide to coordinate international action based on these crucial and just demands for the seafarers.

In a world in turmoil, seafarers will not be sacrificed for the profits of shipowners.

## THE UNION ADMINISTRATIONS

PANHELLENIC UNION OF MERCHANT MARINE ENGINEERS

PANHELLENIC UNION OF LOWER ENGINE CREW MEMBERS OF THE MERCHANT MARINE "STEFENSON"

Piraeus, 18 March 2026

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### Π.Ε.Μ.Ε.Ν

**ΓΡΑΦΕΙΑ:** ΜΠΟΥΜΠΟΥΛΙΝΑΣ 21 • 185 35 ΠΕΙΡΑΙΑΣ • Τ. 210 4115260 • [www.pemen.gr](http://www.pemen.gr) • e-mail: [info@pemen.gr](mailto:info@pemen.gr)

### Π.Ε.Κ.Π.Μ.Ε.Ν. «ο ΣΤΕΦΕΝΣΩΝ»

**ΓΡΑΦΕΙΑ:** ΝΟΤΑΡΑ 108 (1ος όροφος) • 185 35 ΠΕΙΡΑΙΑΣ • Τ.: 210 42 80 102 • [www.stefenson.gr](http://www.stefenson.gr) • e-mail: [stefenson4@gmail.com](mailto:stefenson4@gmail.com)