**Human Rights at Sea**

**Press Release**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00:01 am 1 March 2022**

**Geneva Declaration launched to safeguard human rights at sea**

**London. UK. / Geneva. Switzerland.** The Geneva Declaration on Human Rights at Sea has been launched today to define and defend the human rights of the global maritime population and those crossing the world’s oceans and seas.

Developed by UK-based NGO Human Rights at Sea, the Declaration targets human rights abuses stemming from piracy, criminal violence, breaches of maritime labour rights, seafarer abandonment, slavery, trafficking, child labour, and failures in equality and inclusion.

The launch follows three years of research and drafting by a team of experts in public, international, humanitarian, and refugee law. The Declaration applies to seafarers, fishers, workers in offshore oil and gas, and the tourism industry and extends to passengers, scientists, state officials on naval and coast guard vessels, migrants and refugees, and people involved in unlawful activities.

Given the challenging and underregulated nature of the global maritime environment, abuse of human rights at sea is inadequately reported, enforced, or remedied. People continue to disappear, die, and be assaulted at sea.

“We estimate that there are around 30 million men, women and children at sea at any time. All have human rights. Sadly, they are out of sight and out of mind as far as most people are concerned. Far too often, their human rights are breached or wantonly abused. Those responsible for the ill-treatment of vulnerable people at sea far too frequently act with impunity. This Declaration is aimed at protecting the vulnerable and ending the impunity of those doing the abusing.”, drafting team member Professor Steven Haines said.

HRAS asserts that if these abuses were occurring on land, they would be publicised and addressed. However, in the maritime environment, those with the authority and responsibility to intervene frequently turn a blind eye.

“The Declaration corroborates that human rights abuses occurring at sea are not only wide-ranging but prolific. Unfortunately, parties involved be those flag states, coastal states, or port states, do not always respond appropriately, if indeed they respond at all. The admittedly complicated jurisdictional issues are no reason whatsoever for human rights abuses to be allowed to occur.”, Professor Irini Papanicolopulu said.

As such, the Geneva Declaration of Human Rights at Sea aims to generate global awareness and an international response to human rights violations at sea and ensure effective remedy for victims.

It is structured around the understanding that the protection of human rights at sea rests on four fundamental principles:

1. Human rights at sea are universal; they apply at sea, as they do on land.
2. All persons at sea, without any distinction, are entitled to their human rights.
3. There are no maritime specific reasons for denying human rights at sea.
4. All human rights established under both treaty and customary international law must be respected at sea.

“There are no new obligations contained in the Declaration. No states are being asked to take on new responsibilities. The Declaration brings together the various human rights obligations that all states have and explains how they apply to people at sea. Human rights are universal, and they do not stop at applying at the shoreline.” Professor Anna Petrig said.

The Geneva Declaration on Human Rights at Sea promotes compliance with human rights at sea by providing port states, coastal states, and flag states with guidance to help expand human rights protections and support the vision to end abuse.

“The Declaration contains practical guidance to states on how they can meet the obligations that they have under already existing international human rights law. We have to recognise that not all states have the same capacities and resources, but that does not mean that obligations can be ignored.” Dr Sofia Galani said.

For example, flag states are obligated to ensure compliance with human rights onboard. The Declaration provides guidance on how this should happen on the high seas and when in territorial waters.

The overlap of the human rights obligations of flag states, port states, and coastal states are addressed in the Declaration, with cooperation between these parties being encouraged.

The guidelines in the Declaration note it is good practice for port states to monitor flag states’ compliance with human rights on board their vessels and take necessary steps to ensure an effective remedy for those individuals whose rights may be breached.

The Declaration encourages coastal states to monitor flag states’ compliance with human rights onboard while those vessels are present within internal waters and to ensure its own domestic legislation is extended to its territorial waters to better protect human rights at sea.

The Declaration has been peer-reviewed by some of the world’s leading law firms: Norton Rose Fulbright, HFW, DLA Piper, and Reed Smith.

“We are incredibly grateful to the drafting team and the law firms who have supported the development of the Declaration. This is the first time that the human rights of all people at sea have been codified in one document. For far too long, the sea has been a space where those who want to abuse the human rights of people are allowed to do so freely and without consequence. The Declaration will help to stop that. We look forward to advocating for its adoption by states over the coming months.” Human Rights at Sea CEO David Hammond said.

Members of the drafting team and Human Rights at Sea staff are today in Geneva and London meeting with various political and policy figures to present the Declaration.

ENDS.

Notes to Editors

1. Human Rights at Sea is a UK-registered NGO dedicated to preventing, detecting, and remedying human rights abuses at sea.
2. The Declaration has been published in English, Arabic, French, and Mandarin, with more translations to follow. These will be available at from [www.humanrightsatsea.org/GDHRAS](http://www.humanrightsatsea.org/GDHRAS) 1st March 2022.
3. The Drafting Team consists of the following members. Brief biographies of the drafting team are available at [www.humanrightsatsea.org/GDHRAS](http://www.humanrightsatsea.org/GDHRAS)
   * David Hammond, CEO Human Rights at Sea
   * Dr Elizabeth Mavropoulou, Head of Research Human Rights at Sea, Visiting Lecturer in International Law, University of Westminster
   * Professor Steven Haines, Professor of Public International Law, University of Greenwich
   * Professor Irini Papanicolopulu, Associate Professor of International Law, University of Milano-Bicocca
   * Professor Anna Petrig, Chair of International and Public Law, University of Basel
   * Dr Sofia Galani, Associate Professor of International Law, University of Milano-Bicocca
4. Members of the drafting team and HRAS staff team are available for interview and comment
5. For further information, please contact Martyn Illingworth, Head of Operations at Human Rights at Sea, [martyn.illingworth@humanrightsatsea.org](mailto:martyn.illingworth@humanrightsatsea.org)