

Human Rights at Sea Nautical Institute Malta Briefing

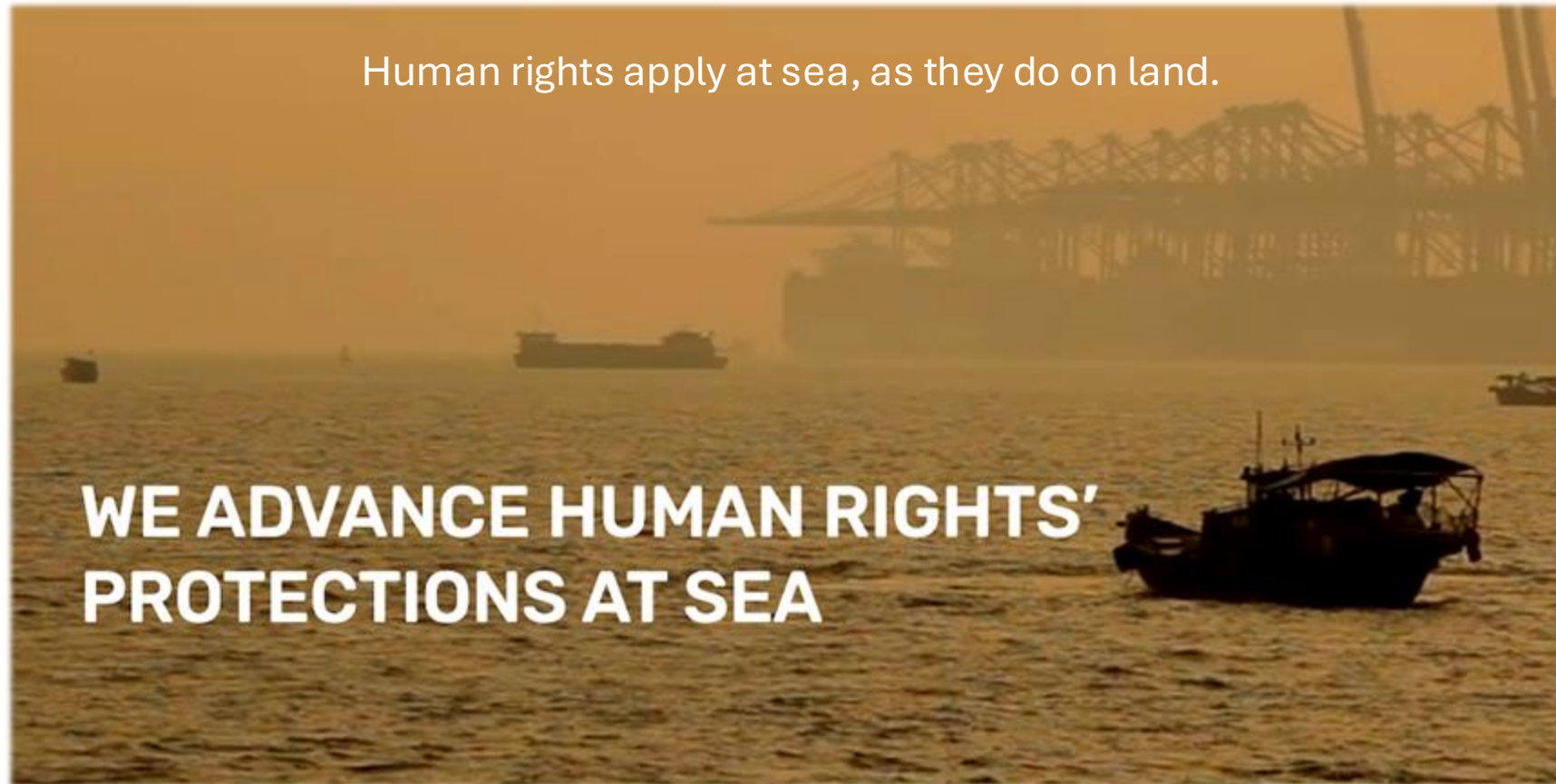
Thursday 4 December 2025

David Hammond Esq. AFNI

Founder Human Rights at Sea

Executive Director Human Rights at Sea International

Civil Society



About

- Established 2014 by David Hammond Esq. AFNI
- UK non-profit Charity (2015-2025) to Community Interest Company (2025)
- Patron: Lord Robin Teverson (UK House of Lords, LibDem Cross bench Peer)
- UN Global Compact Member (2015)
- **Observer to Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (2019)**
- **UN Economic and Social Council Accreditation (ECOSOC) (2022)**
- Year 12 as a global research, investigation and advocacy resource hub
- Originator of the Geneva Declaration on Human Rights at Sea
- Subject of House of Lords Inquiry into ‘UNCLOS: Fit for Purpose in the 21st Century?’

***’Needed, but not wanted’**

Websites

www.humanrightsatsea.org | www.hrasi.org

Context: Overview

- **Estimated 30 Million** people living, working and transiting at sea every day.
- September 2020 Global pandemic and seafarer crew-change crisis identified labour abuses at sea (extended contracts, lack of access to medical care, logistic hub failures, unlawful orders by owners to ship's Masters, abandonment).
- **45%** of women working at sea reported sexual harassment.
- Estimated **100,000** fishermen's deaths per annum.
- **11%** of all seafarer deaths 2019-2023 were from suicide surpassing the number of deaths caused by onboard injuries.
- **52** countries where Human Rights at Sea (HRAS) has influenced Law & Policy development.
- 150 reports, publications and resources issued since 2014.
- **130,000** seafarers' onshore welfare facilities assured by updating primary legislation in one coastal state (New Zealand).
- Recent fieldwork and investigations in Ukraine, Philippines, Northern Ireland.
- **Ongoing investigations:** Pacific Region for unexplained fisheries observer death at sea.



HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA

Context: State Concerns

- + Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing
- + Acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea
- + Terrorist attacks on commercial vessels (Red Sea, Black Sea, Gulf)
- + Refugee and Migrant interdiction (Mediterranean Sea, Andaman Sea, South China Sea)
- + Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking
- + **BUT...Impact on families and dependents – *the hidden endemic of seafarer abuse***



Photo Credit: Royal Navy



Photo Credit: Royal Navy



Photo Credit: BBC

Context: Scope of Abuses at Sea

- + Slavery
- + Human Trafficking (+ migrant smuggling)
- + Homicide
- + Physical and mental abuse / Bullying, Harassment, Exploitation
- + Sexual exploitation
- + Failure to rescue persons in distress at sea
- + **Validity of attacks on commercial vessels in times of conflict**



Photo Credit: IntraFish



Photo Credit: ABC News



Photo Credit: Greenpeace



Photo Credit: Ukraine SBU

Need

- **Independent organisations in the civil society sector that are trusted to report facts in a transparent, objective and accountable manner.**
 - Serious organised crime groups operating globally through sea lanes and containerisation.
 - Lack of public awareness of human rights abuses at sea.
 - Growing levels of mixed migration by sea linked to organised crime syndicates.
 - Impunity in unlawful operations by flag states, coastal states, beneficial owners, recruiters and managers of crew.
- + Arguable breakdown of effective enforcement of rule of law at sea with mounting geo-political tensions and reality of UNCLOS enforcement**
- Q. What is left for ocean governance?**

Seafarers: Disposal Assets

Lloyd's List 

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Seafarers are disposable in shipping, says Human Rights at Sea founder

David Hammond reflects on the charity's achievements following its closure because of a lack of funding

08 Apr 2025 | NEWS



by [Joshua Minchin](#)

[@JoshMinchin](#)

joshua.minchin@lloydslistintelligence.com

Hammond said his 'naivety' when he set up the UN-consultant charity has been replaced by a realism that crew are 'a commodity'

Disposable: Easily replaced

Assets: Necessary for business



Criminalisation

Ali Albokhari Case: Phoenician M

A Turkish court sentenced Captain Marko Bekavac and First Officer Ali Albokhari to 30 years in prison.

- Cocaine found in the cargo of their Panama-flagged vessel.
- Acquittal of eight other crew members due to lack of evidence linking them to the drugs.
- Prosecution emphasised the command responsibility of the senior officers.

- Singular public campaign by wife, Elena.
- Families are abandoned.





HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA



<https://youtu.be/ewzi5fBlnbU>

Criminalisation



Iran

- 4 Ongoing cases
- Seafarers lost in judicial system
- Owner abandoned crew
- Business trading continues
- Lack of representation
- Limited national state support

Lives changed forever

Political negotiation assets

Impotence to intercede



“The shipowner has completely abandoned them, stopped paying their salaries since December 2023, and refuses to provide any financial or legal support. We have learned that he [the shipowner] even collected the crew’s insurance money and purchased a new vessel, leaving them behind to face this ordeal alone.”



HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA

Geneva Declaration on Human Rights at Sea



Four Fundamental Principles

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

www.gdhras.com



Advocacy & Reporting



'Normalize human rights narrative' urges Manila Maritime SAR and HRAS Forum Participants

From C-suite boardrooms to ship control rooms: 'Normalize human rights narrative' urges Maritime SAR and HRAS forum participants OP-ED Yrhen Bernard Sabanal Balinis MNI MANILA, PHILIPPINES - In an effort to identify current opportunities in the field of maritime search and rescue and support the

Access to Justice Law Reform and Policy Development



Lawlessness in the Mediterranean Continues with Attack on Ocean Viking

The August attack by the Libyan Coast Guard on the MV Ocean Viking as it searched for a vessel in distress was another demonstration of how international law and the value of human life is being disregarded in the Mediterranean Sea. The Ocean Viking had 87 survivors and 34 humanitarian and maritime

Access to Justice Migrants & Refugees



Endorsing the Manila Declaration for Seafarers Human Rights, Safety and Wellbeing

Human Rights at Sea has endorsed and committed to supporting the Manila Declaration on Seafarers' Human Rights, Safety and Well-Being, 2 September 2025. On the final day of the 2025 International

Law Reform and Policy Development



Awareness of human rights at sea raised among maritime officials in Vanuatu

GUEST BLOG - Dr Marika McAdam On 25 - 29 August 2025, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Regional Office on Southeast Asia and the Pacific (UNODC ROSEAP) facilitated a workshop on responding

Access to Justice Law Reform and Policy Development Slavery at Sea



Are Humanitarian Activists of the Global Sumud Flotilla prepared for Israeli Use of Force?

At the time of writing the 22 vessel humanitarian flotilla are off-shore Tunisia preparing for the next leg towards Gaza to attempt to breach the Israeli blockade and deliver aid - but are they

Access to Justice



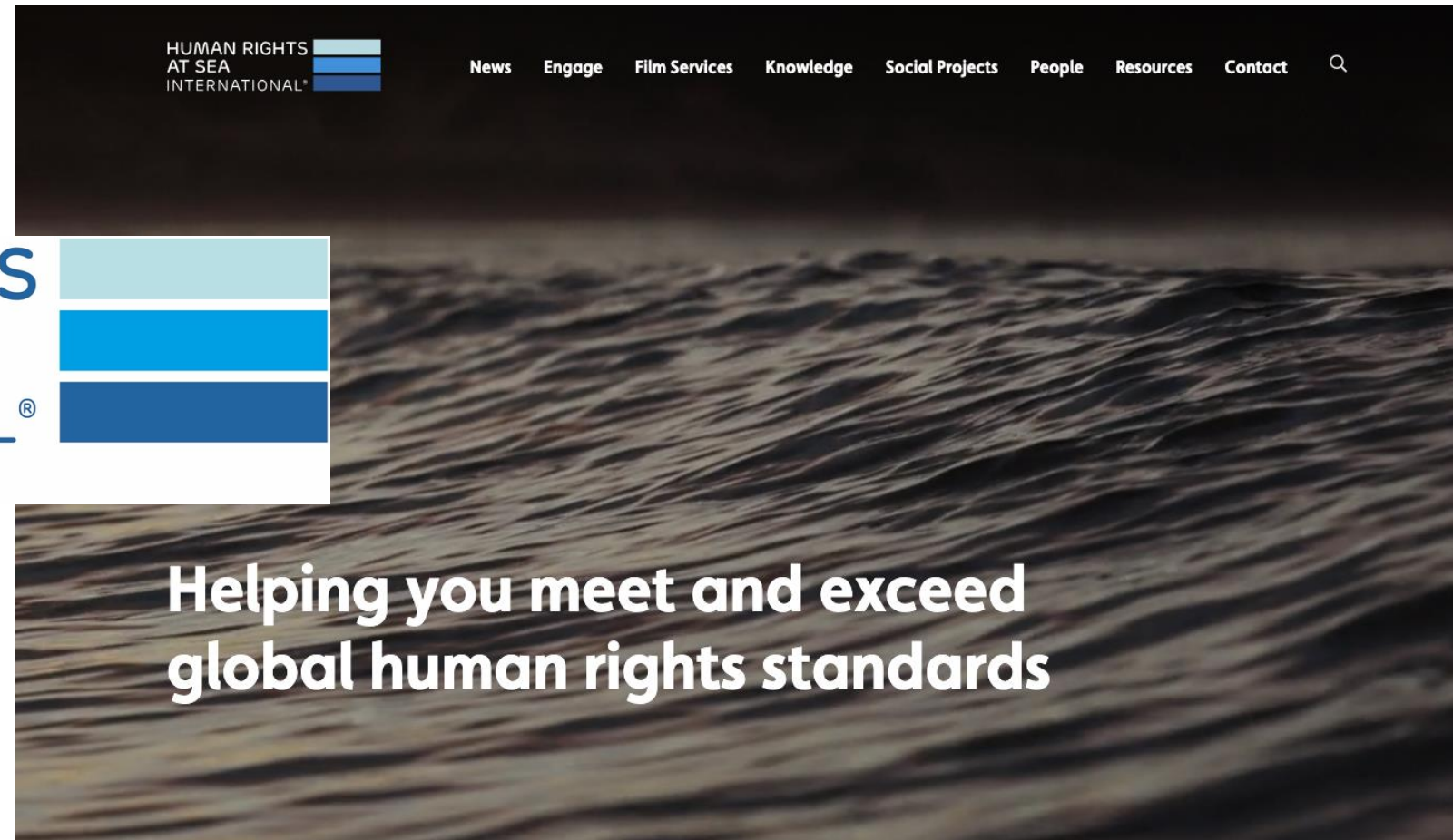
Maritime Cadet awareness film on Bullying, Harassment and Exploitation Launched

In pro bono support of the Sailors Society 2025 Wellness at Sea Cadet conferences preparing the next generation for work, Human Rights at Sea has produced a new lived-experience film. The need to

Access to Justice Projects and Initiatives

<https://www.humanrightsatsea.org/news>

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QUESTIONS

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