

World Maritime University Briefing

MLP (Maritime Law and Policy) – LLP 102
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Malmö Sweden

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HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA

Human rights apply at sea, as they do on land.

**WE ADVANCE HUMAN RIGHTS'
PROTECTIONS AT SEA**

About

- Established 2014
- 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 2023 House of Lords Inquiry into ‘UNCLOS: Fit for Purpose in the 21st Century?’

***’Needed, but not wanted’**

Websites

www.humanrightsatsea.org | www.hrasi.org | www.gdhras.com

PROPOSITION

#1. There is little requirement for civil society in a dominant commercially run, state-enacted and UN specialized agency overseen global transport system.

Discuss.

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).

PROPOSITION

#2. Civil society is best placed in a watchdog role, not a collaborative industry partner.

Discuss.



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



HUMAN RIGHTS AT SEA

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 – Hormuz / Black Sea**



Photo Credit: IntraFish



Photo Credit: ABC News



Photo Credit: Greenpeace



Photo Credit: Ukraine SBU

PROPOSITION

#3. Civil society is a hindrance to commercial maritime and state-level activity.

Discuss.

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 – only become apparent when an exposé occurs.
- 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

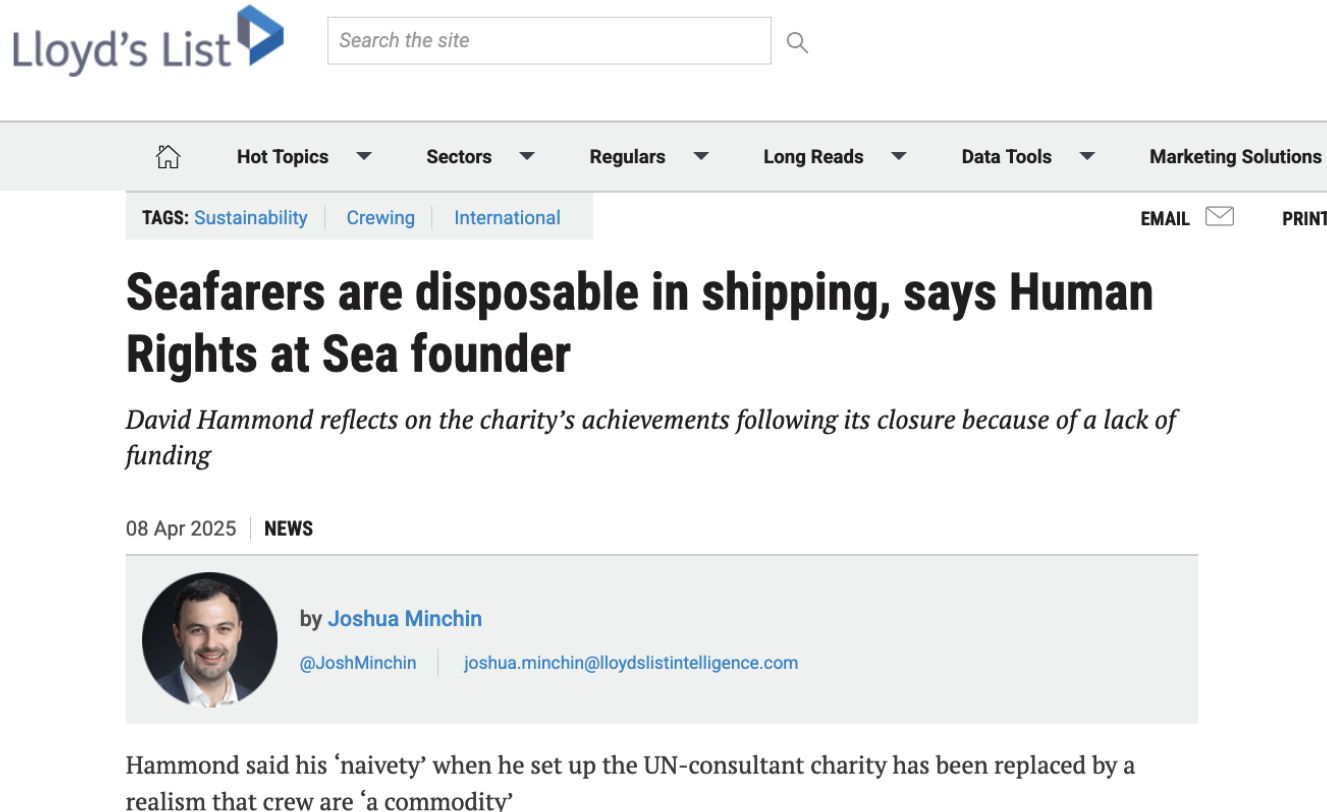
Q. What is left for ocean governance?

PROPOSITION

#4. Seafarers are a disposable workforce driving an unnecessary focus on individual rights and welfare provision.

Discuss.

Seafarers: Disposal Assets



Lloyd's List


Home Hot Topics Sectors Regulars Long Reads Data Tools Marketing Solutions

TAGS: Sustainability Crewing International EMAIL PRINT

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

PROPOSITION

#5. The focus on seafarers' welfare in the Hormuz crisis is a manufactured narrative to force diplomatic movement for protecting maritime trade and addressing international energy prices.

Discuss.

Criminalisation – Iran / Hormuz



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.”



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.**



PROPOSITION

#6. Assured human rights protections are unobtainable without access to funding and policy decision-makers.

Discuss.



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<https://youtu.be/ewzi5fBlnbU>

PROPOSITION

#7. Soft-law initiatives are wasted effort.

Discuss.



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

PROPOSITION

#8. Seafarer welfare organisations should not be needed in a modern shipping industry.

Discuss.

PROPOSITION

#9. Human rights due diligence and corporate social responsibility due diligence must be mandatory in a global supply chain.

Discuss.

PROPOSITION

#10. Unions have lost their impact through too close a working relationship with industry bodies.

Discuss.



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QUESTIONS?

Contact

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