



The Seamen's Church Institute

A Mariners' Service Agency

Affiliated with the Episcopal Church

RESPONDING TO PIRACY

Douglas B. Stevenson, Director of SCI's Center for Seafarers' Rights shares some information about piracy, the increasing incidences of ship hijacking on the world's seas, and SCI's response.

The Seamen's Church Institute is North America's largest and most comprehensive mariners' service agency. The Institute's Center for Seafarers' Rights upholds the Institute's historic mission of advocating for the rights of the world's seafarers. Since 1834, the Institute has sought to promote merchant mariners' dignity, well-being, and professional training.

Piracy represents a crime against humanity. It is condemned by the international community of nations, and any nation has jurisdiction to bring pirates to justice.

International law defines piracy as any illegal act of violence or detention or any act of depredation committed for private ends by persons on a private ship against persons or property on another ship on the high seas.

In the early 1990s, the Seamen's Church Institute became very involved when piracy was a big problem in the Malacca Straits and South America. In May 1995, SCI's Center for Seafarers' Rights convened a high-level roundtable on piracy that assessed the problem worldwide, exchanged views on how to deal with piracy, and made recommendations on actions to reduce the scourge of piracy.

The International Maritime Organization used the results of SCI's *Piracy Round Table* in developing international guidelines for governments and ships to prevent and suppress acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships.

Recently, pirate attacks have increased in the waters off the coast of Somalia, largely because of failed local government attempts to curtail it. In 2008, at least 293 pirate attacks occurred worldwide; 49 vessels were hijacked, 46 other vessels were fired upon, 889 seafarers were taken

hostage, 32 seafarers were injured, 11 seafarers were killed, and 21 seafarers missing and presumed dead. 111 of the 2008 pirate attacks occurred off the coast of Somalia.

High-profile cases in 2008, including pirates highjacking ships carrying relief supplies to East Africa, a supertanker laden with \$100 million cargo of crude oil, and a ship carrying tanks and other weapons, prompted the United Nations to adopt four Security Council Resolutions to respond to Somali pirates. The resolutions did not, however, address the effects of piracy on seafarer victims.

SCI is concerned that the effects of pirate attacks on seafarer victims and their families is not well known and that few resources exist to care for piracy victims. Some shipping companies provide resources for their seafarers who have been victims of piracy, but effectiveness of the care is unmeasured and no guidelines exist for caring for seafarers post-attack. For example, some shipowners make counseling available to seafarers, but will seafarers voluntarily agree to counseling?

SCI is working with the International Christian Maritime Association in calling for more attention to be made to the effects of piracy on seafarers, specifically:

1. Undertake a comprehensive study on the effects of piracy on its victims
2. Develop international guidelines on caring for victims of piracy
3. Establish a resource and assistance center for piracy victims and shipowners

RESOLUTION

*ADOPTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN
MARITIME ASSOCIATION MEETING IN
HONG KONG, CHINA, ON 29 OCTOBER 2008*

The International Christian Maritime Association,

Alarmed by the recent incidents of attacks upon and hijacking of vessels at sea off the coast of Somalia that highlight the threat that acts of piracy and armed robbery against vessels pose to seafarers and fishers there and in other parts of the world,

Deeply concerned for the grave danger that acts of piracy and armed robbery pose to seafarers and fishers and the long-term effects that they have on victims of such attacks and their families,

Lamenting that seafarer and fisher victims of acts of piracy and armed robbery and their families are often left without appropriate care, including counseling, after the attacks,

1. Deplores all acts of piracy and armed robbery against seafarers and fishers;
2. Urges all States to cooperate with each other, with relevant international organizations, and with the maritime industry to coordinate their efforts to deter acts of piracy and armed robbery against seafarers and fishers;
3. Urges the International Maritime Organization and the International Labour Organization to develop guidelines for shipowners on caring for seafarer and fisher victims of piracy and armed robbery at sea;
4. Calls upon all States and interested organizations, including the International Maritime Organization, the International Labour Organization and maritime industry organizations, to work together to establish a resource center for shipowners, seafarers, and fishers on the availability of specialized counseling, medical care and other appropriate services for victims of piracy and armed robbery at sea;
5. Pledges the cooperation and assistance of the International Christian Maritime Association in providing care and assistance to seafarer and fisher victims of piracy and armed robbery at sea and in accomplishing the above initiatives.

To learn more about the work of SCI and its fight against the scourge of piracy, visit www.seamenschurch.org.