

SOLAS – a time to re-assess, a time to change



A message from Secretary-General
Mr. Koji Sekimizu

IMO is exploring new ways of partnership. Recently, the first ever symposium on the future of ship safety was conducted at IMO headquarters.

The symposium was attended by hundreds of technical experts and influential figures in the maritime community. Representatives from the shipping industry, shipbuilders, classification societies, academia, Governments and IMO took the opportunity to reinforce their already strong partnerships, while contemplating future regimes for ship safety.

We heard views from the cruise industry, container ship operators, the tanker industry, engine manufacturers and ship builders. We heard some of the lessons learnt from the Fukushima nuclear incident. We listened to the views of the younger generation in the shipping industry and to those of suppliers of navigation aids. We heard that previous experience within the industry in facing the challenges involved in meeting new regulations are encouraging.

My strong message to the symposium was that safety should be placed firmly in the centre of IMO's activities and that the maritime community should start considering a new regime for the future. I welcomed the positive contributions made by the industry and classification societies to support these concepts.

The 1974 SOLAS Convention is a good framework and we can update it as necessary, as we have seen over the last four decades. But, in the years to come, my aspiration is to encourage the maritime community to use more safety-assessment and risk-assessment techniques in framing goal-based regulations. We should also consider how we can make progress in firmly establishing a safety culture.

I took the opportunity to share with the symposium my belief that we need to start, as soon as possible, a holistic review of the current regime. We should not rush now, but we should start working with all stakeholders, taking into account the potential of new technology and innovation, which should be encouraged but, at

the same time, seriously assessed, in order to ensure that safety will not be compromised. We should not underestimate the potential of goal-based regulations, if properly introduced and involving all players.

For the future safety regime, risk-based and goal-based approaches should be the main avenues to supplement prescriptive regulations. To realize that objective, it will be essential to invent a new system to collect and analyse casualty and safety data, involving shipping companies, classification societies, flag States, port States and casualty investigation institutions. This will take time to develop; and even more time will be required to realize the benefits from such a system after its implementation. But, we should start preparing such a system now.

I hope that we can visualize a future safety regime, moving forward to a more systematic safety control by all players, including Governments, Administrations, classification societies, shipping companies, shipbuilders etc, moving towards risk-based and goal-orientated approaches. This is the way to embrace new technology and innovation, while maintaining safety.

The availability of essential data is key, as is the need for a new regulatory framework – which might require a review of the SOLAS Convention. 2014 is the 100th anniversary of SOLAS, and 2024 will be the 50th anniversary of the 1974 SOLAS Convention.

My vision is to introduce a system change before we celebrate that anniversary in 2024.

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