

Reply Letter to SG of IMO on  
Proposal for UN humanitarian  
assistance operation in the  
Mediterranean

Drafted by: OCHA

Proofread by: LQ/GB/BS/CFZ

Authorized: \_\_\_\_\_

16 November 2015

17 November 2015

Dear Mr. Sekimizu,

I would like to thank you for your letter of 25 September 2015 and the proposal prepared by the International Chamber of Shipping. Your initiative on this important issue is timely and much appreciated.

Seafarers and the shipping industry deserve to be commended for their critical role in saving lives at sea. I take note of the enormous difficulties in responding to many distress calls and I assure you that their noble efforts are recognized with immense gratitude by the international community.

The proposal by the International Chamber of Shipping is a testament to the shipping industry's commitment to the long-established and duly codified maritime tradition of rescuing persons in distress at sea, in compliance with international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue.

Since search and rescue operations at sea are first and foremost a state responsibility, the United Nations is actively working with Member States and regional organizations, including the European Union and coastal States, to ensure that measures are adopted and implemented to fulfil this responsibility. Our priority must be to save lives through the establishment of solid search and rescue operations, as well as measures to ensure that masters of vessels assist persons in danger at sea.

The United Nations is also encouraging broader efforts to combat human smuggling and respond to the human rights and protection needs of refugees and migrants, including the development of additional legal pathways to reach protection and safety. The high-level meeting on "Strengthening cooperation on migration and refugee movements in the perspective of the new development agenda" that I convened on 30 September 2015, and numerous meetings that I have held with concerned leaders, underlined the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the drivers of irregular migration and refugee flows and enhances reception and assistance for refugees who seek asylum, whether in the developed or developing world.

Mr. Koji Sekimizu  
Secretary-General  
International Maritime Organization  
London

Interventions by Member States at General Assembly meetings focusing on the current crises have revealed that these messages are now taking root, with broader acceptance by States of their responsibilities. My conversations with European leaders indicate that they share your sense of urgency and clear commitment to address current challenges.

It remains critical, in light of the enormity of the task, not to duplicate or substitute ongoing Member State and European Union regionally coordinated efforts in the Mediterranean, or to supplant fundamental state responsibilities.

Once again, let me thank you and the International Chamber of Shipping for your important initiative, and I look forward to working closely with you on monitoring further developments in the Mediterranean region and designing effective responses to persons in danger and in need of assistance at sea.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ki-moon Ban". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ki" and last name "Ban" being more prominent than the middle name "moon".

BAN Ki-moon