

Convention 164**CONVENTION CONCERNING HEALTH PROTECTION  
AND MEDICAL CARE FOR SEAFARERS**

The General Conference of the International Labour Organisation,  
Having been convened at Geneva by the Governing Body of the International  
Labour Office, and having met in its Seventy-fourth Session on 24 September  
1987, and

Noting the provisions of the Medical Examination (Seafarers) Convention,  
1946, the Accommodation of Crews Convention (Revised), 1949, the Accommodation  
of Crews (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1970, the Ships' Medicine Chests  
Recommendation, 1958, the Medical Advice at Sea Recommendation, 1958, and the  
Prevention of Accidents (Seafarers) Convention and Recommendation, 1970, and

Noting the terms of the International Convention on Standards of Training,  
Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers, 1978, as regards training in  
medical aid in the case of accidents or illnesses that are likely to occur on  
board ship, and

Noting that for the success of action in the field of health protection and  
medical care for seafarers, it is important that close co-operation be main-  
tained in their respective fields between the International Labour Organisation,  
the International Maritime Organization and the World Health Organization, and

Noting that the following standards have accordingly been framed with the co-  
operation of the International Maritime Organization and the World Health  
Organization, and that it is proposed to seek their continuing co-operation  
in the application of these standards, and

Having decided upon the adoption of certain proposals with regard to health  
protection and medical care for seafarers, which is the fourth item on the  
agenda of the session, and

Having determined that these proposals shall take the form of an international  
Convention,

adopts this eighth day of October of the year one thousand nine hundred and  
eighty-seven the following Convention which may be cited as the Health Protec-  
tion and Medical Care (Seafarers) Convention, 1987:

*Article 1*

1. This Convention applies to every seagoing ship whether publicly or pri-  
vately owned, which is registered in the territory of any Member for which the  
Convention is in force and which is ordinarily engaged in commercial maritime  
navigation.

2. To the extent it deems practicable, after consultation with the representative  
organisations of fishing-vessel owners and fishermen, the competent authority  
shall apply the provisions of this Convention to commercial maritime fishing.

3. In the event of doubt as to whether or not any ships are to be regarded as  
engaged in commercial maritime navigation or commercial maritime fishing for the

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purpose of this Convention, the question shall be determined by the competent authority after consultation with the organisations of shipowners, seafarers and fishermen concerned.

4. For the purpose of this Convention the term “seafarer” means any person who is employed in any capacity on board a seagoing ship to which this Convention applies.

#### *Article 2*

Effect shall be given to this Convention by national laws or regulations, collective agreements, works rules, arbitration awards or court decisions or other means appropriate to national conditions.

#### *Article 3*

Each Member shall by national laws or regulations make shipowners responsible for keeping ships in proper sanitary and hygienic conditions.

#### *Article 4*

Each Member shall ensure that measures providing for health protection and medical care for seafarers on board ship are adopted which—

- (a) ensure the application to seafarers of any general provisions on occupational health protection and medical care relevant to the seafaring profession, as well as of special provisions peculiar to work on board;
- (b) aim at providing seafarers with health protection and medical care as comparable as possible to that which is generally available to workers ashore;
- (c) guarantee seafarers the right to visit a doctor without delay in ports of call where practicable;
- (d) ensure that, in accordance with national law and practice, medical care and health protection while a seafarer is serving on articles are provided free of charge to seafarers;
- (e) are not limited to treatment of sick or injured seafarers but include measures of a preventive character, and devote particular attention to the development of health promotion and health education programmes in order that seafarers themselves may play an active part in reducing the incidence of ill-health among their number.

#### *Article 5*

1. Every ship to which this Convention applies shall be required to carry a medicine chest.

2. The contents of the medicine chest and the medical equipment carried on board shall be prescribed by the competent authority taking into account such factors as the type of ship, the number of persons on board and the nature, destination and duration of voyages.

3. In adopting or reviewing the national provisions concerning the contents of the medicine chest and the medical equipment carried on board, the competent authority shall take into account international recommendations in this field, such as the most recent edition of the *International Medical Guide for Ships* and the *List of Essential Drugs* published by the World Health Organization, as well as advances in medical knowledge and approved methods of treatment.

4. The medicine chest and its contents as well as the medical equipment carried on board shall be properly maintained and inspected at regular intervals,

not exceeding 12 months, by responsible persons designated by the competent authority, who shall ensure that the expiry dates and conditions of storage of all medicines are checked.

5. The competent authority shall ensure that the contents of the medicine chest are listed and labelled with generic names in addition to any brand names used, expiry dates and conditions of storage, and that they conform to the medical guide used nationally.

6. The competent authority shall ensure that where a cargo which is classified dangerous has not been included in the most recent edition of the *Medical First Aid Guide for Use in Accidents Involving Dangerous Goods* published by the International Maritime Organization, the necessary information on the nature of the substances, the risks involved, the necessary personal protective devices, the relevant medical procedures and specific antidotes is made available to the master, seafarers and other interested persons. Such specific antidotes and personal protective devices shall be on board whenever dangerous goods are carried.

7. In cases of urgent necessity and when a medicine prescribed by qualified medical personnel for a seafarer is not available in the medicine chest, the shipowner shall take all necessary steps to obtain it as soon as possible.

#### Article 6

1. Every ship to which this Convention applies shall be required to carry a ship's medical guide adopted by the competent authority.

2. The medical guide shall explain how the contents of the medicine chest are to be used and shall be designed to enable persons other than a doctor to care for the sick or injured on board both with and without medical advice by radio or satellite communication.

3. In adopting or reviewing the ship's medical guide used nationally, the competent authority shall take into account international recommendations in this field, including the most recent edition of the *International Medical Guide for Ships* and the *Medical First Aid Guide for Use in Accidents Involving Dangerous Goods*.

#### Article 7

1. The competent authority shall ensure by a prearranged system that medical advice by radio or satellite communication to ships at sea, including specialist advice, is available at any hour of the day or night.

2. Such medical advice, including the onward transmission of medical messages by radio or satellite communication between a ship and those ashore giving the advice, shall be available free of charge to all ships irrespective of the territory in which they are registered.

3. With a view to ensuring that optimum use is made of facilities available for medical advice by radio or satellite communication—

(a) all ships to which this Convention applies which are equipped with radio installations shall carry a complete list of radio stations through which medical advice can be obtained;

(b) all ships to which this Convention applies which are equipped with a system of satellite communication shall carry a complete list of coast earth stations through which medical advice can be obtained;

(c) the lists shall be kept up to date and in the custody of the person on board responsible for communication duties.

4. Seafarers on board requesting medical advice by radio or satellite communication shall be instructed in the use of the ship's medical guide and the medical section of the most recent edition of the *International Code of Signals* published by the International Maritime Organization so as to enable them to understand the type of information needed by the advising doctor as well as the advice received.

5. The competent authority shall ensure that doctors providing medical advice in accordance with this Article receive appropriate training and are aware of shipboard conditions.

#### Article 8

1. All ships to which this Convention applies carrying 100 or more seafarers and ordinarily engaged on international voyages of more than three days' duration shall carry a medical doctor as a member of the crew responsible for providing medical care.

2. National laws or regulations shall determine which other ships shall be required to carry a medical doctor as a member of the crew, taking into account, inter alia, such factors as the duration, nature and conditions of the voyage and the number of seafarers on board.

#### Article 9

1. All ships to which this Convention applies and which do not carry a doctor shall carry as members of the crew one or more specified persons in charge of medical care and the administering of medicines as part of their regular duties.

2. Persons in charge of medical care on board who are not doctors shall have satisfactorily completed a course approved by the competent authority of theoretical and applied training in medical skills. This course shall comprise—

- (a) for ships of less than 1,600 gross tonnage which ordinarily are capable of reaching qualified medical care and medical facilities within eight hours, elementary training which will enable such persons to take immediate, effective action in case of accidents or illnesses likely to occur on board ship and to make use of medical advice by radio or satellite communication ;
- (b) for all other ships, more advanced medical training, including practical training in the emergency/casualty department of a hospital where practicable and training in life-saving techniques such as intravenous therapy, which will enable the persons concerned to participate effectively in co-ordinated schemes for medical assistance to ships at sea, and to provide the sick or injured with a satisfactory standard of medical care during the period they are likely to remain on board. Wherever possible, this training shall be provided under the supervision of a physician with a thorough knowledge and understanding of the medical problems and circumstances relating to the seafaring profession, including expert knowledge of radio or satellite communication medical services.

3. The courses referred to in this Article shall be based on the contents of the most recent edition of the *International Medical Guide for Ships*, the *Medical First Aid Guide for Use in Accidents involving Dangerous Goods*, the *Document for Guidance - An International Maritime Training Guide* published by the International Maritime Organization, and the medical section of the *International Code of Signals* as well as similar national guides.

4. Persons referred to in paragraph 2 of this Article and such other seafarers as may be required by the competent authority shall undergo refresher courses to enable them to maintain and increase their knowledge and skills and to keep abreast of new developments, at approximately five-year intervals.

5. All seafarers, during their maritime vocational training, shall receive instruction on the immediate action that should be taken on encountering an accident or other medical emergency on board.

6. In addition to the person or persons in charge of medical care on board, a specified crew member or crew members shall receive elementary training in medical care to enable him or them to take immediate effective action in case of accidents or illnesses likely to occur on board ship.

#### *Article 10*

All ships to which this Convention applies shall provide all possible medical assistance, where practicable, to other vessels which may request it.

#### *Article 11*

1. In any ship of 500 or more gross tonnage, carrying 15 or more seafarers and engaged in a voyage of more than three days' duration, separate hospital accommodation shall be provided. The competent authority may relax this requirement in respect of ships engaged in coastal trade.

2. In any ship of between 200 and 500 gross tonnage and in tugs this Article shall be applied where reasonable and practicable.

3. This Article does not apply to ships primarily propelled by sail.

4. The hospital accommodation shall be suitably situated, so that it is easy of access and so that the occupants may be comfortably housed and may receive proper attention in all weathers.

5. The hospital accommodation shall be so designed as to facilitate consultation and the giving of medical first aid.

6. The arrangement of the entrance, berths, lighting, ventilation, heating and water supply shall be designed to ensure the comfort and facilitate the treatment of the occupants.

7. The number of hospital berths required shall be prescribed by the competent authority.

8. Water closet accommodation shall be provided for the exclusive use of the occupants of the hospital accommodation, either as part of the accommodation or in close proximity thereto.

9. Hospital accommodation shall not be used for other than medical purposes.

#### *Article 12*

1. A standard medical report form for seafarers shall be adopted by the competent authority as a model for use by ships' doctors, masters or persons in charge of medical care on board and hospitals or doctors ashore.

2. The form shall be specially designed to facilitate the exchange of medical and related information concerning individual seafarers between ship and shore in cases of illness or injury.

3. The information contained in the medical report form shall be kept confidential and shall be used for no other purpose than to facilitate the treatment of seafarers.

*Article 13*

1. Members for which this Convention is in force shall co-operate with one another in promoting protection of the health of seafarers and medical care for them on board ship.

2. Such co-operation might cover the following matters :

- (a) developing and co-ordinating search and rescue efforts and arranging prompt medical help and evacuation at sea for the seriously ill or injured on board a ship through such means as periodic ship position reporting systems, rescue co-ordination centres and emergency helicopter services, in conformity with the provisions of the International Convention of Maritime Search and Rescue, 1979, and the *Merchant Ship Search and Rescue Manual* and *IMO Search and Rescue Manual* developed by the International Maritime Organization;
- (b) making optimum use of fishing vessels carrying a doctor and stationing ships at sea which can provide hospital and rescue facilities;
- (c) compiling and maintaining an international list of doctors and medical care facilities available world-wide to provide emergency medical care to seafarers;
- (d) landing seafarers in port for emergency treatment;
- (e) repatriating seafarers hospitalised abroad as soon as practicable, in accordance with the medical advice of the doctors responsible for the case, which takes into account the seafarer's wishes and needs;
- (f) arranging personal assistance for seafarers during repatriation, in accordance with the medical advice of the doctors responsible for the case, which takes into account the seafarer's wishes and needs;
- (g) endeavouring to set up health centres for seafarers to—
  - (i) conduct research on the health status, medical treatment and preventive health care of seafarers;
  - (ii) train medical and health service staff in maritime medicine;
- (h) collecting and evaluating statistics concerning occupational accidents, diseases and fatalities to seafarers and integrating and harmonising them with any existing national system of statistics on occupational accidents, diseases and fatalities covering other categories of workers;
- (i) organising international exchanges of technical information, training material and personnel, as well as international training courses, seminars and working groups;
- (j) providing all seafarers with special curative and preventive health and medical services in port, or making available to them general health, medical and rehabilitation services;
- (k) arranging for the repatriation of the bodies or ashes, in accordance with the wishes of the next of kin, of deceased seafarers as soon as practicable.

3. International co-operation in the field of health protection and medical care for seafarers shall be based on bilateral or multilateral agreements or consultations among Members.

*Article 14*

The formal ratifications of this Convention shall be communicated to the Director-General of the International Labour Office for registration.

*Article 15*

1. This Convention shall be binding only upon those Members of the International Labour Organisation whose ratifications have been registered with the Director-General.

2. It shall come into force twelve months after the date on which the ratifications of two Members have been registered with the Director-General.

3. Thereafter, this Convention shall come into force for any Member twelve months after the date on which its ratification has been registered.

*Article 16*

1. A Member which has ratified this Convention may denounce it after the expiration of ten years from the date on which the Convention first comes into force, by an act communicated to the Director-General of the International Labour Office for registration. Such denunciation shall not take effect until one year after the date on which it is registered.

2. Each Member which has ratified this Convention and which does not, within the year following the expiration of the period of ten years mentioned in the preceding paragraph, exercise the right of denunciation provided for in this Article, will be bound for another period of ten years and, thereafter, may denounce this Convention at the expiration of each period of ten years under the terms provided for in this Article.

*Article 17*

1. The Director-General of the International Labour Office shall notify all Members of the International Labour Organisation of the registration of all ratifications and denunciations communicated to him by the Members of the Organisation.

2. When notifying the Members of the Organisation of the registration of the second ratification communicated to him, the Director-General shall draw the attention of the Members of the Organisation to the date upon which the Convention will come into force.

*Article 18*

The Director-General of the International Labour Office shall communicate to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for registration in accordance with Article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations full particulars of all ratifications and acts of denunciation registered by him in accordance with the provisions of the preceding Articles.

*Article 19*

At such times as it may consider necessary the Governing Body of the International Labour Office shall present to the General Conference a report on the working of this Convention and shall examine the desirability of placing on the agenda of the Conference the question of its revision in whole or in part.

*Article 20*

1. Should the Conference adopt a new Convention revising this Convention in whole or in part, then, unless the new Convention otherwise provides—

- (a) the ratification by a Member of the new revising Convention shall *ipso jure* involve the immediate denunciation of this Convention, notwithstanding the provisions of Article 16 above, if and when the new revising Convention shall have come into force;
  - (b) as from the date when the new revising Convention comes into force this Convention shall cease to be open to ratification by the Members.
2. This Convention shall in any case remain in force in its actual form and content for those Members which have ratified it but have not ratified the revising Convention.

*Article 21*

The English and French versions of the text of this Convention are equally authoritative.