

Seafarer kidnapping and criminalisation top concern for shipping organisations

Rising unjust treatment and detention of seafarers led the agenda at a gathering of the roundtable of international shipping organisations comprising Bimco, Intercargo, Intertanko, and International Chamber of Shipping (ICS).

[Marcus Hand](#), Editor

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Credit: Houthi Press Release

The round table chairpersons Nikolaus H Schües of [Bimco](#), John Xylas of [Intercargo](#), Emanuele Grimaldi of the [ICS](#), and Rolf Westfal-Larsen Jr. of [Intertanko](#), meet in Athens on 6 February and discussed a range of issues including green house gas emissions and the impact of geopolitics on shipping, but the most important topic they said was the rise in the unjust treatment of seafarers.

“Throughout 2024 we have witnessed a rise in the number of kidnappings and cases of rogue detention and imprisonment of our seafarers. This is devastating and highly concerning,” the chairpersons stated.

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) has reported a rise in hostage taking of ship’s crew with 126 seafarers were kidnapped last year against 73 in 2023 and 41 in 2022. The most high-profile kidnapping involved 25 seafarers from the car carrier *Galaxy Leader* by the Houthi in Yemen in November 2023, who were finally freed in January this year after 14 months in captivity.

“Seafarers should not risk jail sentences, kidnappings or attacks while performing their essential duties. Two weeks ago, we heard the news that the 25-member crew of the *Galaxy Leader* had been released after being kidnapped at gunpoint and held in captivity for over 430 days by the Houthis. Unjustified deprivation of liberty and attacks on innocent seafarers are attacks on individuals, the shipping industry, supply chains and world trade,” the chairpersons said.

Related: [Galaxy Leader crew freed](#)

In the case of criminalisation and rogue detention and imprisonment of seafarers when drugs are found on board a ship the round table noted a lack of reliable data.

In September last Captain Marko Bekavac and Chief Mate Ali Albokhari of the *Phoenician M* were sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment, after drugs were found on board the vessel while docked in the Black Sea port of Ereğli, Turkey, in October 2023.

The Panama-flagged vessel was transporting coal from Colombia when police found 137kg of cocaine on board. The Master and Chief Officer were sentenced to 30-years imprisonment despite no evidence of wrongdoing and the Captain having immediately reported the discovery of the drugs to the shipowner. Union the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) has described the case as "outrageous".

The round table said they would seek to address the problem of criminalisation with a comprehensive overview to understand the scale of the issue.

Separately ship manager association [InterManager](#) has started to compile figures on seafarer criminalisation and while in its early stages had documented 118 cases by mid-January.

Related: [Shore leave and abandonment - we need to do better for seafarers](#)

"Let's not forget that seafarers facilitate the transport of over 80% of world trade. Despite the challenges they face, they continue to work to the highest professional standards, and we will work collectively towards raising awareness about seafarers lacking some of the fundamental rights that some other keyworkers enjoy," the round table chairpersons stated.