

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE IMO AND THE PROTECTION OF VITAL SHIPPING LANES INITIATIVE

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO)

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO) is a specialised agency of the United Nations. The IMO was established in 1959. The IMO's main task has been to develop and maintain a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping and its remit today includes safety, environmental concerns, legal matters, technical co-operation, maritime security and the efficiency of shipping.

The IMO has 167 Member States and three Associate Members, and is based in the United Kingdom with around 300 international staff.

The IMO's specialised committees and sub-committees are the focus for the technical work to update existing legislation or develop and adopt new regulations, with meetings attended by maritime experts from Member Governments, together with those from interested intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.

The IMO has a comprehensive body of international conventions aimed at enhancing safety and the prevention of accidents, including standards for ship design, construction, equipment, operation and manning. The key conventions include the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) and the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW).

“Protection of Vital Shipping Lanes” Initiative

The IMO, in the context of its work on enhancing the safety of navigation, has over several decades recognised the need to keep shipping lanes of strategic importance safe and open to international maritime traffic and thereby ensuring the uninterrupted flow of traffic there-through. As a result IMO adopted a number of traffic separation schemes and routing measures. In addition, in areas where the number of piracy and armed robbery against ships incidents were giving raise to concerns, IMO provided specific advice and guidance.

The Straits of Malacca and Singapore (the Straits) have been of particular interest to IMO over a number of years, especially as a result of the number and nature of the piracy and armed robbery incidents which were occurring during the early part of 2000s. A Meeting on the Straits of Malacca and Singapore: Enhancing Safety, Security and Environmental Protection was convened by IMO in consultation with Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (the littoral State) and was held in Jakarta, Indonesia in September 2005. The Jakarta Meeting adopted the Jakarta Statement, which sets out the measures the littoral States have put in place to address the three issues and provides a basis of future co-operation between the littoral States, user States and other stakeholders on matters related with the Straits.

A follow-up meeting to the Jakarta Meeting was convened by IMO again in consultation with the littoral States and was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in September 2006. The Kuala Lumpur Meeting adopted the Kuala Lumpur Statement which records the developments since the Jakarta Meeting and identifies a number of projects aimed at enhancing safety and environmental protection in the Straits for which sponsors and donors are presently being sought. In addition, during the Kuala Lumpur Meeting, the littoral States presented their ideas about a standing mechanism of co-operation between them and user States and other stakeholders.

The next Meeting will be held in Singapore from 4-6 September 2007.