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Agenda item 17(g)

C 114/17(g)/Add.1  
26 June 2015  
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## EXTERNAL RELATIONS

### (g) IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea

#### Note by the Secretary-General

#### SUMMARY

*Executive summary:* This document reports on the recommendations of the Assessment Panel and the decision of the Panel of Judges on the recipient of the 2015 IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea

*Strategic direction:* 11

*High-level action:* 11.1.1

*Planned output:* No related provisions

*Action to be taken:* Paragraph 19

*Related document:* C 114/17(g)

#### Outcome of the Assessment Panel

1 As stated in paragraph 3 of document C 114/17(g), the Assessment Panel met at IMO Headquarters on 14 May 2015, under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General's nominee, the Director of the Legal Affairs and External Relations Division, to scrutinize the nominations (see annex to document C 114/17(g)) which had been received for this year's Awards. The Assessment Panel comprised representatives of the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), the International Maritime Pilots' Association (IMPA), the International Federation of Shipmasters' Associations (IFSMA), the International Salvage Union (ISU), the International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF) and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).

2 The Assessment Panel examined a total of 27 nominations, which had been received from 10 Member States and two non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO and, in accordance with the Guidelines for the Award, submitted its proposals for the Award, Certificates of Commendation and Letters of Commendation, together with the rationale leading to its recommendations, for consideration by the Panel of Judges.

### **Outcome of the Panel of Judges**

3 The Panel of Judges met at IMO Headquarters on 26 June 2015, under the chairmanship of the Chairman of the Council, to consider the recommendations of the Assessment Panel and to select the recipient of the Award. The Chairmen of the Maritime Safety Committee, the Marine Environment Protection Committee and the Facilitation Committee were present at the meeting. The Chairmen of the Legal Committee and the Technical Cooperation Committee could not attend but submitted their recommendations for consideration by the Panel.

4 After carefully considering the rationale and recommendations of the Assessment Panel, the Panel of Judges decided to select:

#### ***For the Award***

5 Aviation Survival Technician Christopher Leon, crew member of the rescue helicopter CG-6531, US Coast Guard Air Station San Francisco, nominated by the Government of the United States of America, as the recipient of the **2015 IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea**.

6 On the evening of 20 June 2014, the crew of the rescue helicopter CG-6531, having just completed a night training flight, was directed to provide assistance to the ocean rower **Britannia** with four people on board, 60 mile offshore Monterey, California. The 30 knot winds and pounding 15 foot seas had rendered their boat unseaworthy as it was taking on water and its crew was incapable of rowing in the dangerous seas.

7 When rescue helicopter CG-6531 arrived at the scene, the **Britannia** was 90% submerged. The darkness of night, lack of visual cues and horizon, and breaking wave action compounded the difficulty of the rescue. AST Christopher Leon was deployed and, battling the rough seas and swift currents, swam to the waterlogged vessel. The crew determined that hoisting the survivors directly from the tight confines of the nearly sunken vessel would be extremely challenging and pose higher risk so AST2 Leon planned to take each survivor into the water where he could place them more safely into the rescue basket. As he entered the frigid waters with the first survivor, they were immediately swept away from the vessel. With extraordinary strength and stamina, maintaining a firm grasp on the shocked survivor and swimming hard to keep them both afloat, AST2 Leon managed to lift the survivor into the swaying basket enabling the flight mechanic to hoist him to safety.

8 The **Britannia** had now drifted more than 500 yards away from the helicopter and was obscured by high waves and low freeboard. AST2 Leon was recovered by the aircrew, repositioned and redeployed to the vessel to prepare the remaining three survivors for pickup. In view of the declining fuel reserve of the helicopter, the crew realized that they only had time for one more hoist before having to depart and therefore decided that, despite the increased risk, two survivors should be hoisted simultaneously, directly from the sinking vessel, a bold departure from normal operating procedures.

9 With barely any fuel to make it safely to land, the crew made the difficult decision to leave AST2 Leon and the remaining survivor behind. The aircrew deployed the helicopter's only life raft to AST2 Leon and the terrified survivor to provide them with a more suitable platform to shelter from the extreme elements, but the raft was swept away by the gale force winds. Without regard for his own safety, AST2 Leon made the decision to remain aboard the swamped vessel with the survivor who by then had become hypothermic as, had he attempted to retrieve the life raft, he would most likely not have been able to swim back to the vessel, thus putting the survivor in greater peril. AST2 Leon huddled over the survivor to

protect him from the breaking waves and frigid temperatures for more than two gruelling hours as they drifted hopelessly in the dark, 15 foot seas, cramped in the tiny bow portion of the swamped vessel that remained above water.

10 Having delivered the first three survivors to awaiting emergency services at San Luis Obispo Airport, 90 miles away, and with less than 20 minutes of fuel remaining, the aircrew, after refuelling, flew back to the drifting **Britannia**. Upon arrival, they found the remaining survivor suffering from hypothermia and AST2 Leon hampered by the adverse and fatiguing effects of floating for hours on the small remnants of a boat, in 15 foot seas and strong winds, in pitch black. The degrading visual references, turbulent wave action and pressing need to proceed with the rescue made the following sortie even more challenging. The crew performed two more demanding hoists to recover the last survivor and AST2 Leon before deciding to fly back to Monterey Airport to expedite the delivery of the hypothermic survivor to awaiting emergency medical services. By this time, the weather had deteriorated, requiring an already worn-out crew to perform a precision instrument approach to weather minimums to land safely.

11 The aircrew returned to Air Station San Francisco mentally and physically exhausted after six taxing hours of flight time.

#### ***For Certificates of Commendation***

12 Based on the above description of events and the important part played by the other two crew members of the rescue helicopter CG-6531, namely Lieutenant Scott Black and Aviation Maintenance Technician Michael Spraggins, the Panel of Judges decided that they should both receive a **Certificate of Commendation**.

13 The Panel of Judges further agreed that the following nominees (not in any order of merit) should also receive **Certificates of Commendation** citing their acts of bravery:

- Able Seaman Vicente Somera, crew member of the M/V **Lars Maersk**, nominated by Australia for his role in rescuing, in treacherous sea conditions, gale force winds and total darkness and after three challenging hours, a hypothermic sailor who had sustained several life-threatening falls attempting to repair an oil leak on his sailing vessel and who had jumped overboard in an attempt to retrieve a messenger line which had been thrown to him;
- Skipper Jean-Claude Van Ryment and the crew of the rescue launch SNS 129 **Notre Dame de la Garoupe**, volunteers at Saint Martin Station, National Maritime Rescue Association (NSRM), nominated by France, for their arduous and relentless attempts to rescue, during the passage of Cyclone Gonzalo, a couple and a baby aboard the vessel **Voyage II**, which eventually struck reefs. After evacuating the family and despite the total loss of the **Notre Dame de la Garoupe**, the volunteer crew continued to assist other ships which had grounded on the shore;
- Father Ilia Kartoza (posthumously), Abbot of the Monastery of Saint David the Builder, Patriarchate of Georgia, passenger on the ro-ro/passenger ship **Norman Atlantic**, nominated by Georgia, for sacrificing his own life whilst helping other passengers evacuate the ship, after its car deck had caught fire in extreme weather conditions and poor visibility; and

- Lieutenant John Hess, Lieutenant Matthew Vanderslice, Aviation Maintenance Technician Derrick Suba and Aviation Survival Technician Evan Staph, crew members of the rescue helicopter CG-6033, US Coast Guard Air Station Cape Cod, nominated by the United States of America, for rescuing, in a severe winter storm with hurricane warnings, two persons on board the sailing vessel **Sedona**, which had suffered engine failure with risk of capsizing or sinking.

### ***For Letters of Commendation***

14 The Panel further recommended that the following nominees (not in any order of merit) should receive Letters of Commendation in recognition of their actions:

- Captain Lai Zhixing, Master of the rescue vessel **Nan Hai Jiu 111**, Nanhai Rescue Bureau, nominated by China, for rescuing, during Typhoon Kalmaegi, three crew members from the cargo boat **Shenyuan 1415**, who had abandoned their sinking ship and were found in a fish raft and, in a separate incident which occurred the next day, for saving two ships, the tug ship **MISO1**, which had suffered engine failure and was dragging anchor whilst towing the unpowered M/V **MISO2**, in very strong winds and rough seas;
- The crew of the M/V **Xinfa Hai**, nominated by China, for saving the cargo vessel **Thor Commander** which had suffered engine failure and was drifting towards the Great Barrier Reef at the risk of stranding, and thus preventing a pollution incident and damage to the marine environment; and
- Petty Officer William Hubert, crew member of the helicopter Rescue Tango, Detachment of 35F flotilla at Tahiti-Faa'a, French Navy, nominated by France (with the other two members of the crew), as a special recognition amongst his crew, for his role in rescuing in a two-stage operation, in darkness and very poor weather conditions, 10 crew members of the capsized and partly submerged fishing boat **Papi Vieux**, who were found in a tender and a life raft tethered to it.

### **Other matters addressed by the Panel of Judges**

15 As in previous years, the Panel of Judges noted that a full, clear and detailed description of the circumstances and events was missing from a number of nominations and thus making it difficult to accurately evaluate the nomination. The Panel of Judges also concurred with the recommendation of the Assessment Panel that several nominations submitted did not meet the criteria for the Award as the nominated rescues did not occur at sea or those rescued did not emanate from a vessel.

16 The Panel recommended that the Secretary-General should encourage Governments to submit nominations and that, if possible, they be submitted to the Secretariat well in advance of the stipulated deadline.

17 Taking into consideration the unusual number of nominations received related to the rescue of migrants at sea, which do not fall within the scope of the Bravery Award, the Panel was of the view that the Secretary-General may wish to seek the endorsement of the Council to give special recognition to all merchant vessels involved in such humanitarian rescues around the world, as a separate activity.

18 Finally, the Panel of Judges expressed its appreciation to Mrs. Dany Broderick-Bunn of the Secretariat, upon her impending retirement, for her outstanding support to both the Assessment Panel and the Panel of Judges over the last couple of years.

**Action requested of the Council**

19 The Council is invited to take note of the information provided in this document and to endorse the outcome of the Panel of Judges with respect to its recommendations for the Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea, the Certificates of Commendation and the Letters of Commendation.

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