

Maritime Talks 2013

Current Challenges for the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Global Warming, Piracy, and the Polar Regions

9 March 2013

Professor König,
Dr Balkin,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to the Maritime Talks 2013 at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

I am very grateful to the International Foundation for the Law of the Sea, and in particular to you, Professor König, for organizing this event again. The maritime talks have acquired a kind of customary status.

Also this year, the Foundation had the right touch in choosing highly interesting topics for our discussions, topics which showcase the important work of a major actor in the international law of the sea, the International Maritime Organization.

In this context, it is a particular honour for me to welcome Dr Rosalie Balkin, the Assistant Secretary-General and Director of Legal Affairs and External Relations Divisions of the IMO. Dr Balkin will address our meeting shortly and will enlighten us on the challenges the IMO is currently facing.

I am equally grateful to the other distinguished speakers who kindly accepted our invitation.

I am grateful to you, Ladies and Gentlemen in the audience, for coming here so early on a Saturday morning and despite the bad weather that has hit us again after those particularly beautiful first spring days of last week.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin my opening remarks with a historical excursion.

The Roman general and statesman Pompey, in the year 56 B.C., reportedly declared: “*Navigare necesse est, vivere non est necesse*”, meaning “Navigation is necessary, living is not”. Pompey was addressing sailors who were hesitant to cast off as the seas were so rough that they feared for their lives.

Maritime navigation has always been a dangerous undertaking while, at the same time, human societies became, and still are, largely dependent on it.

This was also the reason why Pompey was so merciless with his sailors – because they were expected to transport grain from Sicily, Sardinia and Africa to Rome where the local population urgently needed it.

Today’s world is more dependent on navigation than ever. And, luckily, the dreadful alternative of ‘navigating or living’ that Pompey described is no longer valid. While we should not forget that seafaring remains a dangerous business we can also be glad that it has become much safer.

Of course, it was technological and scientific progress that brought about those remarkable improvements to maritime safety. However, this progress has been driven by the efforts of the international community to create rules and safety standards applicable to maritime shipping.

In the centre of those efforts stands the IMO. Its history, which dates back to the year 1948, is indeed a success story. Take just the IMO’s major treaties, the “SOLAS Convention”. Without doubt, this Convention has developed, under the auspices of the IMO, into the most important international legal instrument relating to the safety of merchant vessels.

The achievements of the IMO do not stop there. The organization has also addressed other dangers resulting from increased maritime traffic, in particular the

risk of pollution and other harmful effects on the maritime environment. A large number of important international legal instruments, most prominently among them the MARPOL Convention, bear witness of the intensive efforts made by the IMO in these fields.

The broad spectrum of the IMO's activities is also reflected in the topics of today's presentations, including such diverse issues as greenhouse gas emissions, ship recycling, traffic in Polar Regions and the fight against piracy.

In concluding, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you all an interesting and fruitful day of presentations and discussions and I now hand over to Professor König.