



## **PRESS RELEASE**

SINGAPORE, 11 MAY 2024 | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **The Singapore Maritime Officers' Union and the Singapore Organisation of Seamen Call for Fair Treatment of Seafarers in Wake of the Baltimore Bridge Collapse**

- 1 The Singapore Maritime Officers' Union (SMOU) and the Singapore Organisation of Seamen (SOS) extend their condolences to the families and loved ones of the six construction workers who tragically lost their lives on March 26 when the container ship, MV Dali, allided with the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, resulting in its collapse. We also express our deep concern about the potential criminalisation of seafarers onboard vessels currently detained.
- 2 SMOU and SOS visited the vessel on April 24 to ensure the safety and well-being of the seafarers on board MV Dali and to assess the current situation. We commend the U.S. Coast Guard and ground personnel for their empathy towards the crew, who have been cooperative throughout this ordeal.

#### **Seafarers' Wellbeing a Top Priority**

- 3 Synergy Marine has prioritised the MV Dali crew's well-being. The company's mental health program, *WeTeam*, has proactively reached out to the crew and their families back home to offer support. In addition, we at SMOU have shared details of our own "Wecare" program and encouraged the seafarers to contact us directly, even after returning home, if they need someone to talk to.
- 4 While some crew members are coping, morale has understandably dipped. Specific concerns include:
  - i) **Unfounded fear of personal criminal liability** among the seafarers;
  - ii) **Emotional distress** faced by the seafarers who witnessed the incident first-hand;

- iii) **Loss of communication** with family members due to confiscation of mobile devices, causing significant hardship for crew members with young children at home.

### **SMOU/SOS Calls For Fair Treatment Of The MV Dali Seafarers**

- 5 SMOU and SOS have actively sought solutions to alleviate the crew's hardships. During various meetings, we have requested:
- i) **Swift return of confiscated mobile phones** to the crew;
  - ii) **Extension or Renewal of expired visas** for shore leave;
  - iii) **Expedited repatriation** for seafarers not required for further investigation following the first court hearing.
- 6 We deeply appreciate the AFL-CIO Maritime Trade Department Executive Board's agreement to support our call for the fair treatment. SMOU and SOS are also working with the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and our US affiliate, the Seafarers International Union (SIU) and the International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots (MM&P).

### **International Collaboration Key in Protecting Seafarers**

- 7 SMOU and SOS emphasize the importance of international collaboration in protecting seafarers from undue criminalisation. We are working closely with the ITF, MM&P and SIU to continue to stand steadfast in defending our members and advocating for their well-being.

### **Quote(s) from Key Stakeholders:**

#### **Mary Liew, SMOU General Secretary**

“Our top priority remains the safety and well-being of our seafarers on board the detained vessels. While we cooperate fully with the investigation, recent actions have caused undue hardship for the crew. The criminalisation of seafarers based solely on their position on board a vessel during an incident is a growing concern. We urge all parties involved to prioritise a fair and balanced

approach that protects the rights of seafarers and ensures their swift repatriation if they are not required for further investigation."

**Kam Soon Huat, SOS President**

"SOS is deeply concerned about the mental health and overall well-being of seafarers currently onboard the MV Dali. Access to communications, especially with loved ones and family members are essential for their well-being. We are dedicated to the welfare of seafarers and are resolute in our commitment to ensuring that their mental health is prioritised."

**Dave Heindel, SIU President**

"There are many components to this story, but the well-being and fair treatment of the crew must not be overlooked in the course of the investigation. However long the investigation takes, the crew's rights and welfare should not be infringed upon during its course. We call on the authorities to be mindful that seafarers utilize mobile devices to conduct personal business for bill payments and more importantly, transfer money to their home country to sustain families. Crew members are becoming demoralized without the basic tools we all take for granted."

**Don Marcus, MM&P President**

"The prolonged detention of MV Dali seafarers aboard their vessel and the failure by authorities to return their personal communication devices are unjust. This must be rectified. Our hearts go out to the Master, Officers and Crew of the M/V Dali, who not only suffered a mortifying and tragic experience resulting in the loss of six lives, but who continue to remain in isolation from their loved ones."

- 8 SMOU and SOS remain steadfast in defending our members and advocating for their well-being. We urge all parties involved to prioritize the human element and ensure a swift resolution that allows the crew to return home to their families.

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### **About Singapore Maritime Officers' Union (SMOU)**

SMOU was established in 1951. The union has grown from a membership base of about 400 in the 1970s to more than 30,000 members. SMOU is pivotal in promoting good industrial relations between seafarers (members) and their employers, the ship owners and ship-management companies, and the governments through its strong tripartite relationships with the local, regional and international maritime community. It seeks to improve the wages and working conditions of members in the maritime industry through collective bargaining agreements with shipping companies which employ them.

Since 1993, SMOU has helped distressed seafarers claim more than US\$20 million of unpaid wages. SMOU is an affiliate of NTUC and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). Visit [www.smou.org.sg](http://www.smou.org.sg)

### **About Singapore Organisation of Seamen (SOS)**

The Singapore Organisation of Seamen (SOS) is a global maritime trade union commissioned by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) to promote positive industrial relations between seafarers and their employers, shipping companies. Since 1971, SOS has been representing ratings and helping them receive their dues through Collective Bargaining Agreements with shipping companies. SOS also works actively with tripartite partners to improve the working and living conditions of seafarers and helps members acquire and upgrade skills that meet the demands of the industry. SOS is affiliated to the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and the Nautilus Federation.

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