

Piracy incidents rise for third consecutive year

London, 15 January 2010

The number of reported piracy and armed robbery incidents on the high seas rose for a third consecutive year in 2009, with 406 cases registered compared with 293 the previous year, according to the ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB).

The main reason for nearly 39% rise was the situation off the coast of Somalia, where piracy activity in the region accounted for more than half of all acts of piracy reported last year.

In the year just ended 153 vessels were boarded worldwide, 49 were hijacked, 84 suffered attempted attacks and 120 were fired upon. A total of 1052 crew members were taken hostage, 68 others were injured, and eight were killed. With 74 more vessels being fired upon last year than in 2008, the level of violence and the corresponding injuries and deaths is clearly rising.

"Increases in the frequency and level of violence perpetrated against ships at sea and the people who work them is a serious concern," said IMB Director Captain Pottengal Mukundan. "Our hope is that this escalating volume of piracy is met with a heightened response from the governments and agencies best able to reduce and contain these risks to human life and property."

The total number of reported incidents attributed to Somali pirates in 2009 stands at 217, with 47 vessels hijacked and 867 crew members taken hostage. Attacks in Somalia continue to be characterized as opportunistic in nature, meaning it was an unplanned attack.

In 2008, 111 vessels were targeted by Somali pirates resulting in 42 hijackings. Although the number of incidents attributed to Somali pirates last year almost doubled, the number of successful hijackings was proportionately lower. This is the result of the increased presence and coordination of the international navies along with heightened awareness and robust action by the Shipmasters transiting in the area.

"The international navies play a critical role in the prevention of piracy in Somalia and it is vital that they remain in the region," Captain Mukundan said.

While attacks off the coast of Somalia remain high, the area where they are taking place has shifted. In 2008, the bulk of the attacks were predominantly focused in the Gulf of Aden, but during the last quarter of last year more vessels were being targeted along the east coast of Somalia. Since October, increased activity has also been observed further out in the Indian Ocean with 33 incidents reported, including 13 hijackings. Many of these attacks have occurred at distances of approximately 1,000 nautical miles off Mogadishu, the Somalian capital.

"Mother ships have traditionally posed as fishing vessels or dhows to avoid detection," Captain Mukundan said. "Reports of such crafts so far from the coast should be questioned and investigated."

Other African waters remain very dangerous as well. Twenty-eight incidents were reported for Nigeria last year, with 21 vessels boarded, three fired upon, and one hijacked. Three ship Masters reported an attempted attack on their ships and one crew member was reported killed when robbers tried to escape after looting a vessel.

Because the majority of incidents related to the oil industry and fishing vessels go unreported, external sources suggest at least another 30 unreported attacks likely occurred in Nigeria in 2009.

“The attacks in Nigerian waters are frequently much more violent in nature than those in Somalia. The incidence of violent attacks against ships has also spilled over into neighbouring states,” Captain Mukundan said.

Increases in piracy were also reported in other parts of the globe. For the second consecutive year, incidents in the Singapore Straits have increased, with nine incidents were reported in 2009 compared with six in 2008. Of the nine reported incidents, six vessels were boarded and three reported attempted attacks.

Thirteen incidents were reported by ships steaming in the South China Seas, the highest number than in the previous five years. Of the 13, eleven were boarded, one vessel was hijacked, and one reported an attempted attack.

Even though there has been significant improvements in the safety and security in South East Asian and Far East waters, there still remains an underlying potential for incidents to increase without any prior warning, the report said. It urged that pressure on the pirates and robbers should be maintained by the littoral states and the constant physical presence in the waters.

Indonesia remains a bright spot on piracy, with just 15 incidents recorded in 2009, the majority of which were opportunistic in nature. Piracy activity has also slowed in the Malacca Straits with only two incidents reported in 2009, the same number as the previous year.

Bangladesh (Chittagong) has shown a slight increase in the number of attacks compared with 2008. Most of these have been opportunistic. Of the 17 vessels attacked, 14 were boarded and ship stores stolen.

Piracy remains on the rise in South America, with 37 incidents reported from just 14 in 2008. Twelve incidents occurred in the anchorage of Callao in Peru in 2009, up from the five recorded in the previous year. Other countries impacted include Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Haiti and Venezuela. Most attacks in these countries were successful and were carried out while the vessels were berthed in port or while at anchor, a similar trend to the piracy activity recorded in 2008.

The IMB strongly urges all Shipmasters and Owners to report all incidents of actual and attempted piracy and armed robbery to the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC). This is the first step in the response chain and vital in ensuring that adequate resources are allocated by governments to deal with the problem.

IMB offers quarterly piracy reports free of charge. To request a PDF version of the report by email, please visit:

<http://www.icc-ccs.org/requestreport>

Latest attacks may also be viewed on the IMB Live Piracy Map at:

<http://www.icc-ccs.org/livepiracymap>

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