

MEDIA RELEASE

Worldwide hijackings fall but pirates expand area of operation

Paris, 21 April 2010 – Somali pirates were responsible for 35 of the 67 piracy incidents reported worldwide during the first quarter of the year, the ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reported today.

The number of incidents represents a sharp drop from the 102 attacks reported during the first quarter of last year. "This marked reduction can be attributed to the continued presence and success of the navies in the Gulf of Aden along with the robust anti-piracy measures adopted by the merchant navy fleet," the report said.

Twenty-six vessels were boarded during the first quarter of 2010, with 18 ships fired upon, 12 suffering from attempted attacks, and 11 vessels hijacked. A total of 194 crew members were taken hostage, 12 of whom were injured.

The east and south coast of Somalia recorded 18 incidents including five vessels hijacked and 11 fired upon in the first quarter of 2010 compared with 21 incidents including four vessels hijacked and 11 fired upon for the corresponding period in 2009. Within the Gulf of Aden and in the adjacent Red and Arabian Seas 17 incidents were reported, including the hijacking of four vessels, compared with 41 incidents, including five hijacked vessels, in the first quarter of 2009.

"Somali pirates are dangerous and are prepared to fire their automatic weapons and rocket propelled grenades at vessels in order to stop them," the report said.

But even as the total number of incidents decline, the range of action by Somali pirates continues to expand, spreading from the Gulf of Aden and the southern part of the Red Sea to the coasts off Kenya, Tanzania, the Seychelles, and even Madagascar in the Indian Ocean and Oman in the Arabian Sea.

IMB Director Captain Pottengal Mukundan said that attacks so far from the Somali coast can be possible only through the use of mother ships, some of whom have been destroyed by the navies of the various countries that are operating in the area. Mother ships are large vessels from which smaller boats or skiffs can take to sea, thus allowing the pirates to go increasingly further into the ocean. Some attacks, in fact, have taken place 1,000 nautical miles from the Somali coast.

"Such positive and robust action by the navies against mother ships, pirate skiffs and pirate action groups have been vital to keeping the attacks under control and must be sustained," Captain Mukundan added.

In other African waters, only two incidents were reported in Nigeria although violence towards crews remains high. In one of the two reported incidents, two crew members were injured and had to be taken ashore for medical treatment.

Indonesia reported eight piracy incidents during the first quarter, compared with only one incident for the corresponding period last year. It was the highest number of first quarter incidents the country has seen in two years. It should be noted that while the number of incidents has risen, many were low level attacks against vessels at anchor or at berth.

Serious incidents of piracy, including armed robbery, have been declining in Indonesia since 2003. In the late 1980's and 1990's Indonesian waters were among the world's most dangerous, but steps taken by the Indonesian authorities have been effective in reducing acts of violent piracy. Nonetheless, due regard and caution should be exercised while transiting these waters, the report said.

In the first quarter of 2010, no incidents were reported in the Malacca and Singapore Straits, and only one incident was reported off the coast of Bangladesh.

For further information please contact:

Captain Pottengal Mukundan
Director, ICC International Maritime Bureau
Tel: +44 20 7423 6960
Email :imb@icc-ccs.org