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MEDIA RELEASE

Attacks off the Somali coast drive piracy to record high, reports IMB

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Piracy at sea hit an all-time high in the first three months of 2011, with 142 attacks worldwide, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) International Maritime Bureau's (IMB) global piracy report revealed today. The sharp rise was driven by a surge in piracy off the coast of Somalia, where 97 attacks were recorded in the first quarter of 2011, up from 35 in the same period last year.

Worldwide in the first quarter of 2011, 18 vessels were hijacked, 344 crew members were taken hostage, and six were kidnapped, IMB reported. A further 45 vessels were boarded, and 45 more reported being fired upon.

"Figures for piracy and armed robbery at sea in the past three months are higher than we've ever recorded in the first quarter of any past year," said Pottengal Mukundan, Director of IMB, whose Piracy Reporting Centre has monitored piracy worldwide since 1991.

In the first three months of 2011, pirates murdered seven crew members and injured 34. Just two injuries were reported in the first quarter of 2006.

Of the 18 ships hijacked worldwide in the first three months of the year, 15 were captured off the east coast of Somalia, in and around the Arabian Sea and one in the Gulf of Aden. In this area alone, 299 people were taken as hostage and a further six were kidnapped from their vessel. At their last count, on 31 March, IMB figures showed that Somali pirates were holding captive 596 crew members on 28 ships.

"We're seeing a dramatic increase in the violence and techniques used by pirates in the seas off Somalia," said Captain Mukundan.

He added: "The overwhelming number of vessels hijacked off Somalia took place east and north east of the Gulf of Aden. The positions of some of the attackers' mother ships are known. It is vital that strong action is taken against these mother ships to prevent further hijackings."

Large tankers carrying oil and other flammable chemicals are particularly vulnerable to firearm attack. Captain Mukundan said: "Three big tankers of over 100,000 tonnes deadweight have been hijacked off the Horn of Africa this year. Of a total of 97 vessels attacked in the region, 37 were tankers and of these, 20 had a deadweight of more than 100,000 tonnes."

A number of countries are employing their navies to take a tough stance against piracy. In a recent show of force, commended by the IMB, the Indian navy captured 61 Somali pirates on a hijacked ship off India's west coast.

Elsewhere, in the first quarter of 2011 nine incidents were reported off Malaysia, including the hijacking of a tug and barge off Tioman Island. Vessels were boarded in seven incidents by robbers armed with guns and knives.

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Five incidents have been recorded for Nigeria, with three attacks against vessels in Lagos. Crews in the area are reporting increased violence, including one incident where all 27 crew members were injured. IMB's concerns about an expansion of Nigerian-style piracy have been heightened by the hijacking of a chemical tanker off neighbouring Benin, which its captors finally directed to Lagos.

IMB's Piracy Reporting Centre (PRC) is the only manned centre to receive reports of pirate attacks 24 hours a day from across the globe. IMB strongly urges all shipmasters and owners to report all actual, attempted and suspected piracy and armed robbery incidents to the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre. This first step in the response chain is vital to ensuring that adequate resources are allocated by authorities to tackle piracy. Transparent statistics from an independent, non-political, international organization can act as a catalyst to achieve this goal.

IMB offers the latest 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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A world network of national committees keeps the ICC International Secretariat in Paris informed about national and regional business priorities. More than 2,000 experts drawn from ICC's member companies feed their knowledge and experience into crafting the ICC stance on specific business issues.

The United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the G20 and many other intergovernmental bodies, both international and regional, are kept in touch with the views of international business through ICC.

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