

The ICMA MEDITERRANEAN REGION celebrated its conference in Piraeus (Greece) from October 16th until 19th 2003.

30 representatives from the following countries: Albania, Egypt, Finland, France, Greece, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Spain, Ukraine and United Kingdom, members of different Christian churches (Anglican, Lutheran, Greek Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox and Roman Catholic) joined to discuss the following topics:

1. Preparedness for crisis situations in port areas.
2. Implementation of the ILO Conventions 163 and Recommendation 173 and the creation of Welfare Committees in ports.
3. Welfare services: communications tools and transfer of money facilities for seafarers.
4. The international telephone help line ISAN.
5. Specific problems for seafarers missions in some countries.
6. The ITF Seafarers' Trust.
7. Evangelisation in a globalized world: ecumenism and interreligious work.
8. Psychological aspects of a person staying months away from home.
9. Relation between ICMA centers, ICMA and ILO and IMO.
10. Sailing chaplains

For the opening ceremony the conference was honored by the presence of:
Monsgr. Nikolaos Foscolos, Catholic Archbishop of Athens
Revd. Symeon Venetsianos Secretary of the Metropolitan of Piraeus Kalinikos (Greek Orthodox Church)
Mr. Nicos D. Efthymiou, President of the Greek Shipowners Association
Capt. Nikos Mamalakis, of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs
Mr. Kouzilos, Chairman of the Union of Master Mariners
Mr. Alevizos, of the Prefecture
Ltnt. Maragos A. George of the Piraeus Coast Guard

The participants were working out the mentioned topics and adopted the following conclusions:

1. Preparedness for crisis situations in ports:
According to the guidelines of the Crisis Preparedness Committee, it was agreed that the ICMA centers should try to be included in the emergency plans of their ports and establish their own emergency plan for being able to give an adequate response in case of crisis situations which affect human lifes.
2. Welfare committees in ports:
Taking into account the guidelines of the ILO convention 163 and recommendation 173, it was agreed that ICMA centers should try to contact port authorities, shipowners- and shipagents associations, unions and other relevant bodies in the port community to come together in a welfare committee, which should assume the compromise of sharing efforts to improve the welfare assistance for seafarers in the corresponding port.

3. Communication and transfer of money tools:

A.) Assuming the importance that communication has for seafarers it was agreed that:

ICMA centers should make an effort to be aware about the different offered cards, trying to provide the most favorable in each port.

ICMA centers should also follow the INMARSAT development of offering free equipments in order to establish on board the ships a special set that allow the crew to speak with their homes to a low price from the sea.

B.) Assuming the need of many seafarers to transfer money to their homes and the difficulties they have very often to face for it, it was agreed that ICMA centers should make an effort to find out in their ports the best possibilities for it and help seafarers.

4. The international telephone help line ISAN.

It was informed about the International Seafarers Assistance Network and its 24 hours free helpline. Currently, every seaman from many parts of the world (and in a near future, from any part of the world), can use this line free to get assistance in several languages. He will get information about where is the nearest point to him for getting the assistance he needs or he will get directly the help he needs. Also welfare centers can use it for getting some informations. This service is published through small cards in different languages that should be distributed among seafarers.

The conference agreed to give full support to ISAN distributing their cards and also being ready to assist any seafarer that will be addressed to them.

5. ITF Seafarers Trust:

Many of those present had been recipients of ITF Trust grants in the past. The current financial state of the Trust was explained and missions were encouraged to continue to apply for grants from the Seafarers' Trust, while bearing in mind the limitations due to the recent state of the equities market. The conference also discussed the problem of abandoned seafarers and unpaid wages and also of injured or dead seafarers without payment or compensation and agreed on the necessity of some kind of compulsory insurance guaranteeing the compensation in these circumstances. No ship should be allowed to operate without proper insurance covers for the crew.

6. Specific problems for seafarers missions in some countries.

- a. Countries of the former URSS: It was informed about the different social, religious and political aspects to be taken in account when projecting a new center. It was agreed that ICMA should continue encouraging, advising and giving support to projects for new centers paying attention to the mentioned circumstances.
- b. Centres in the Middle East: It was informed about the special mentalities of some of these countries and the necessity to advise captains and crews in order that they are able to enjoy their staying in such ports, avoiding undesirable experiences. It was agreed that one of the duty of port chaplains should be to deliver properly information about important peculiarities of ports and countries, which can influence in the welfare of seafarers in port. (This is also foreseen in the ILO Recommendation 173).

7. Evangelisation in a globalised world:

The situation of our globalised world, where developed countries are often imposing their interests to the developing countries was discussed. The situation of 3rd. world seafarers on board ships owned by 1st. world countries and multicultural crews was noted.

The maritime world is a fertile ground for ecumenical experiences and maritime pastoral and ecumenical cooperation is essential.

It was agreed that ICMA centers should improve their efforts for an increasing ecumenical work, inviting the Christian Churches of different denominations, present on a port, to join and work together.

8. Psychological aspects of a person staying months away from home:

It was spoken and discussed about the psychological aspects that can affect a person staying months away from home and being part of a crew that very often can be multinational. It was considered the risks of the feeling of losing identity and social mirror.

It was underlined how important for seafarers is to be treated like individuals and not only, for example, by their nationality or rank.

It was agreed that port chaplains should make an effort to help seafarers in this sense by looking always after the person they have in front and also try to invite the crews (through writed leaflets or during conversations) to take this in account.

9. Relation between ICMA centers, ICMA and ILO and IMO.

The conference had a look to the history of ICMA, since its foundation in the year 1969 and specially about its aim and the undertaken activities. Regarding the activities it was exposed how ICMA has official delegations as observers by the International Maritime Organisation and the International Labor Office. ICMA is also a member of the International Committee on Seafarers Welfare and of the ISAN. ICMA has organized several training courses: Maritime Ministry Introduction course, Seafarers Ministry training, Crisis Preparedness training and is planning international training for sailing chaplains.

ICMA is open to new members. It tries to be an important tool for seafarers welfare. ICMA is promoting ecumenical cooperation.

The conference agreed to emphasize the call specially to those Christian denominations who are not yet involved in maritime ministry to join.

10. Sailing chaplains:

SIRC (Seafarers International Research Centre) reported on sailing chaplains. It was exposed the necessity to extend the seafarers ministry on board the ships, given that they are nowadays only for short time in port. It was informed about some experiences made with the collaboration of the Finnish Seamens Mission, the German Seamens Mission and the Apostleship of the Sea in the Philippines. A complete report was handed. It was made a survey with very positive results according the answers of crew members and chaplains.

It was agreed to adapt this experiences according the possibilities of the different countries.

11. ICMA Mediterranean business:

- a.) Structure of this region: It was discussed if this region should remain as it is now or be divided into 2 regions (Mediterranean and Black Sea). The conference agreed, taking in account the peculiarity of this region, that it should remain as one.
- b.) Name of the region: Given that this region includes Mediterranean- , Black- and Red Sea and also the Persian Gulf, it was agreed that the name should be Mediterranean Middle East Region.
- c.) Election of Regional Coordinator: The conference reelected Rev. Ricardo Rodríguez-Martos.
- d.) Place and date for the next ICMA Mediterranean Middle East Conference: The Conference decided that it should be in the port of Constanta (Romania) in October 2006.

Piraeus, October 19th. 2003