

Friday 5th April 2013

Bulletin 879 - 04/13 - Piracy update - Gulf of Guinea

The Club has received the following update on Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea from its correspondents in the area.

"In the Gulf of Guinea, we would remind you that the pirates' zone of action now spreads from the Cameroonian Peninsula up to the Ivory Coast. Incidents of piracy (petroleum cargo theft, hijacking of vessels, kidnapping of crew) have dramatically increased over the last few months in this area. This modus operandi is a very different method to that used by the Somali pirates who demand a ransom for the release of the vessels that they capture.

This increasing insecurity has forced local authorities to react. The Ministers of Defence, Foreign Affairs and Security from 25 Central and West African states met on Tuesday 19th March 2013 in Cotonou, Benin, to establish a plan for cooperation in the fight against piracy and maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea.

According to Agence French Press, Mr. Nassirou Arifari Bako, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Benin declared that "This code of conduct is the new legal line of our collaboration to end this insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea".

The Ministers called for governments to arrest and prosecute suspected pirates and seize any vessels believed to have been used in acts of piracy.

In case of piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea, we usually recommend that vessels should maintain a good look out and observe all anti-pirates measures as recommended by BIMCO and the International Group of P&I Clubs:

- Razor fencing on the railings / bulwarks on main deck (port/starboard)

- All exterior doors to be kept secured/locked;

- Fire main pressurised with fire hoses ready for immediate use;

- Double watch (lookouts) on the bridge, using at least 2 radars (if fitted) to make sure that even small echoes are detected;

We also advise you of the following country/port specific advice received from our local TCI offices:

- Nigeria

The Port of Lagos is considered the safest port in Nigeria and usually there should be no problem for vessels trading in and out of Nigeria. The only issue that might be anticipated is that of port congestion which would entail the vessel having to wait on roads. This of course is dependent on the cargo as container vessels and tankers do not have as much problem in this regard as general cargo vessels.

Should there be any waiting time, the Master is advised to stay as far away as possible from the FWB thus minimising any risk of pirate boarding / attack.

In case of attack in Nigerian waters, the following numbers and details have been provided by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office:

Joint Task Force (Op PULO SHIELD) covering the Niger Delta area

+234 (0)802 363 9153

+234 (0)703 9783346

Email: hqjtfoppuloshield@yahoo.com

Naval Headquarters Operations Room

+234 (0)813 879 9220

Department of State Security

+234 (0)813 222 2106

+234 (0)813 222 2105

- Cotonou

As per our TCI local office, vessels should avoid bunkering off-shore COTONOU as pirate attacks have been noted in this area particularly with regards to stationary tankers STS transfers.

There is no risk of theft when vessel is alongside in Cotonou port.

- Ghana

TCI Ghana recommends immediate reporting of any incident to the maritime Authorities through the Shipping Agent.

It is worth noting that piracy attacks in Ghanaian territorial waters are not common and vessels having been attacked off other countries often seek shelter in Ghanaian waters/ports. However, there is still a need to be "vigilant" even when trading to Ghana.

- Togo

The government, together with the national army, has agreed to allow armed security guards on board vessels in order to deter and defend against piracy at sea. This service must be paid for and any request should be made 72 hours prior to requirement (see our below comments regarding the use of armed guards on board).

- Ivory Coast

In spite of the recent piracy attack on a tanker off the Ivory Coast, our TCI office in Abidjan has confirmed that any vessel can safely enter Ivorian ports, carry out cargo operations and depart without problem.

Finally, please note that we have received in recent months several requests from Clubs / members regarding the provision of private security guards for protection against piracy. We can but recommend that extreme prudence be exercised in the choice of these private armed guards / companies. Many of them are not accepted / authorised by local authorities and guards employed in one country may not be acceptable in the waters of another neighbouring country. This could result in additional serious problems for the vessel and the master.

Before employing any guards it is recommended to obtain at least a list of locally authorised security companies from the local agent or, better still, the written authorisation of the country(ies) at which the vessel is due to call.

We further recommend Members to read the recently published Interim Guidelines for Owners, Operators and Masters for Protection Against Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea Region developed by BIMCO, the International Chamber of Shipping, Intercargo and Intertanko.

We shall closely follow the outcome of the Cotonou conference of 19/10/31 2013 and shall not fail to keep you informed in case of significant developments.”

Source of Information:

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