Communiqué from the Maritime Dialogue Platform II

1. **Background**

    1.1. On the 29th of March 2021, due to a general concern with maritime security threats in the Gulf of Guinea – namely piracy and armed robbery at sea - individuals from the maritime industry met with individuals from various maritime authorities in Ghana and West Africa. The meeting was facilitated by the Centre for Stabilisation at the Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC) and the Multinational Maritime Coordination Centre (MMCC) in Zone F, located in Accra, Ghana.

    1.2. The participating individuals represented a broad range of institutions, including:
    Industry: Maersk, CMA-CGM, MSC, PIL, and other representatives from the Shipowners and Agents Association of Ghana (SOAAG).
    Maritime authorities: Ghana Navy, Ghana Maritime Authority, Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority and the MMCC in Zone E (Cotonou) and Zone F (host).
    Others: CEMLAWS, the Danish Maritime Military Advisor to West Africa, the Royal Danish Defence College.

    1.3. The seminar sought to **further improve the relationship between the maritime industry and maritime authorities**. The dialogue platform enables representatives to share concerns, ideas, and perceptions that can form mutual understanding, trust building, and cooperation. The seminar is funded by and a part of the Danish Maritime Security Programme for the Gulf of Guinea.

    1.4. **The maritime industry** expressed strong concern about safety for seafarers and the potential negative impact that piracy can have on maritime trade in and for the Gulf of Guinea countries. They called for armed guards/private security personnel to be allowed onboard civilian ships as a short-term, quick-impact solution. This can address the concerns of the industry and buy time for states in the region to build capacities and develop sustainable solutions.

    1.5. **The maritime authorities** highlighted the progress that has already been achieved. The information sharing capacity of the Yaoundé Architecture is working well and efforts against pirates have been successful but also led to a shift in pirates modus operandi: Increasingly, pirate attacks take place far from shore where help take longer time to arrive, and other capacities are needed to respond vis-à-vis near-coast incidents.

MMCC Zone E	MMCC Zone F
Located in Cotonou, Benin	*Located in Accra, Ghana*
Covering Nigeria, Togo, and Benin	*Covering Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Conakry, Burkina Faso*
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HF - 8281KHz	HF Channel - 8657 KHz

2. Key themes

2.1. The relationship between the maritime industry and the authorities.

While there is consensus on the need to act against piracy, the stakeholders understanding varies on the situation as well as on the expectations from other stakeholders. Identification of the actor's concerns and needs is the first step in building stronger relations between the parties and increasing mutual understanding.

2.2. Purposeful Information Exchange

Information exchange includes incident reporting, general information sharing, and the facilitation of contact with other relevant authorities. The maritime industry highlights the need for simplicity in information exchange, for example by having a single point of contact to authorities. The MMCCs can serve as a focal point because they cover a wide area. When operating on high seas, it is easier to determine which zone to contact vis-à-vis which country to reach out to.

The type of information exchanged was also discussed. For example, commercial actors are hesitant to share the names of vessels involved in an incident, because a publication of the name might hurt business interests. Taken together, it is necessary to establish clear protocols and SOPs for information exchange that details who, when, and why information is being shared at a given time, and how and to whom this information is subsequently shared. It was also highlighted that information exchange must be tied clearly to *action* for information exchange to be relevant and useful.

2.3. Capacities: Short-Term and Long-Term

While recognising that state capacities must be strengthened and root causes addressed to combat piracy sustainably, it will take years to achieve, and it is costly. There is an urgent need for short-term solutions that can address these shortcomings. Therefore, a promising development relates to the utilisation of air forces in maritime security.

The commercial actors stressed the need for **armed guards as a short-term, quick impact response**. While this is expansive, complicated, and would require strict guidelines from the states, it was presented as the only solution in the short term that could address commercial concerns. Allowing armed guards could provide a temporary solution until state capacities are in place.

3. Recommendations

3.1. **The MMCCs should be used to facilitate information sharing:** The MMCCs may serve as a point of entry to information exchange – both in case of incidents and relating to general enquiries. The MMCCs could be contacted in *parallel* (and not instead) with other institutions, for example, the MDAT-GOG.

3.2. **The contact information of the MMCCs should be made available to commercial ships and captains:** The contact information of the MMCCs, manned 24/7, should be included in the company's instruction to captains to ensure the availability of a single point of contact to maritime authorities. The contact information of zone E and F are included above. The MMCCs and commercial actors should arrange for drill calls to be made to the MMCCs to build confidence.

3.3. **Protocols should be established on how information exchange takes place:** Stakeholders should agree on lines of communication (who calls who – and when) and on how data and information are treated (regarding the release of vessel names to the public, for example). Data validation should be facilitated by reporting centres.
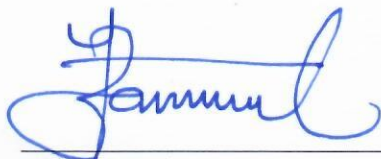
3.4. **Armed guards/private security should be allowed onboard civilian vessels until state capacities have been strengthened:** This requires strict guidelines and takes place temporarily until state capacities have been built.

3.5. **The MMCC should designate high-risk areas** in their zones and produce SOPs for vessels on how they should act in these. These SOPs must be shared with commercial vessels and relevant stakeholders.

3.6. **Maritime Trade Transport Corridors and High-Risk Areas** should be designated for piracy-prone areas, for example by the MMCCs, and SOPs should be produced on how to act in these areas.
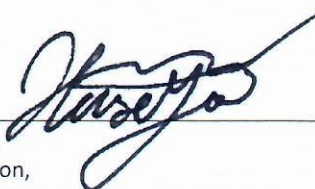
4. Future Talks

4.1. While stakeholders are frustrated with slow progress, including the difficulty in addressing root causes and long-term improvements, others highlighted that the dialogue itself was a deliverable that provides the foundation for common ground.

4.2. Mutual understanding is the first step in finding solutions that work for all stakeholders. Equally important is the achievement of results, and the findings above, therefore, constitute a point of departure for future action.

4.3. Stakeholders are recommended to consider these findings and take steps together to move the relationship forward and implement recommended measures.

4.4. The organisers aim to continue the Maritime Dialogue Platform in the future, although the format and composition will be adjusted according to lessons learned from this seminar.

Signatures:

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