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PRESS RELEASE

22 June 2012

HUMAN COST OF SOMALI PIRACY UPDATED REPORT RELEASED

A report highlighting latest details of the plight of seafarers at the hands of Somali pirates will be launched on Friday 22nd June at a press conference in London. The report, *The Human Cost of Piracy 2011*, is written jointly by Kaija Hurlburt of One Earth Future for its Oceans Beyond Piracy project and by the International Maritime Bureau.

The media are invited to attend the launch, which is due to start at 1:00pm at the Headquarters in London of the International Maritime Organisation at 4 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7SR.

The joint report is an update of the first report on the Human Cost of Piracy for 2010, launched in London by Oceans Beyond Piracy in June last year. This report includes a statistical analysis of the threats of violence caused by acts of piracy as well as the first published findings collected as a result of the Declaration Condemning Acts of Violence Against Seafarers.

The Declaration, signed initially in Washington in August last year by Liberia, the Marshall Islands, and Panama, and by the Bahamas in March 2012, commits signatory states to submit reports to the IMB on the treatment of seafarers held hostage.

“Thousands are attacked for financial gain without regard for the human cost to attain a ransom,” says Kaija Hurlburt, Project Manager with Oceans Beyond Piracy. “In 2011, at least 3,863 seafarers were fired upon by Somali pirates armed with assault rifles and rocket propelled grenades. While the number of hostages has gone down over the past year, the violence faced by seafarers has remained high and attacks are often carried out with a determined ferocity – even against vessels protected by private security teams.”

Of that number, 968 seafarers faced armed pirates who managed to board their vessels. 413 of these seafarers were rescued from citadels (secured rooms) on their vessels by naval forces after waiting, terrified, for hours or even days while pirates tried to break into the citadels.

A total of at least 1,206 hostages were held captive by Somali pirates in 2011. These included 555 seafarers who were attacked and taken hostage during the year, 645 hostages captured in 2010 who remained in pirate hands during 2011, and 6 tourists and aid workers kidnapped on land. The average length of captivity has also increased by 50% over last year, up to an average length of over 8 months. Often these hostages face systematic and daily psychological and physical abuse and were even used as human shields:

“One day pirates drew us out to the open deck, told us to turn back and stand still facing the sea side. Then we heard how they reloaded their machine guns. We understood nothing. We saw US Navy not far out and we were standing and waiting for about two hours . . .”
(Report of released seafarer)

35 hostages died during 2011: 8 were killed by pirates during an initial attack or after being taken captive; 8 died from disease or malnutrition while being held; and 19 died in crossfire while being used as human shields and during hostage rescue attempts.

The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) notes in the report the experiences of the seafarers from 23 of the 77 vessels hijacked in 2010 and 2011 based on reports submitted by the Flag States of Liberia, the Marshall Islands, Panama and the Bahamas, various ship owners and operators, former hostages, and by the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme.

“Various analyses of the Somali piracy problem have so far ignored a meaningful study into the human cost upon the seafarers and their families,” says Captain Pottengal Mukundan, Director of the IMB.

“This report aims to fill this gap and highlight some of the shocking consequences of this crime upon merchant seafarers, who are in the main, silent, involuntary victims. As other initiatives to counter piracy at sea off Somalia have become established, this important area of support to the victim seafarers and their families remains unaddressed. The challenge of any report of this kind is in getting the victims to recall their painful experiences and report them to help victims in the future.”

The report shows that all of the captive crews were subject to treatments in violation of basic human rights and psychological abuse. At least half experienced physical abuse. In addition to those reported to have died in captivity, it says that three of the hostages died following release because of the abuse they experienced at pirate hands.

According to Marcel Arsenault, Chairman of the One Earth Future Foundation and sponsor of the report, piracy is a systemic problem that proliferates from a failed state. “While the report rightfully focuses on violence faced by innocent seafarers, increased violence has also exacted a huge cost on Somali society. The desperate situation in Somalia continues to breed piracy. Piracy will ultimately be solved only by a new global initiative to create jobs and improve governance.”

Oceans Beyond Piracy – a project of One Earth Future Foundation
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