



Governor's Office
St Helena, Ascension
and Tristan da Cunha

DAY OF THE SEAFARERS SPEECH

25 JUNE 2020

I am especially pleased to be here at Rupert's today. This is the most fitting place, with the MV Helena alongside, to pay a tribute on behalf of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha to all seafarers. We perhaps take for granted the low profile, trusted reliability and massive capabilities of the ships and crews of vessels that 24 hours a day, seven days a week transport cargoes around the world. Therefore, it is on special days such as today, the Day of the Seafarer, we take this opportunity to say to the Captain and crew of the MV Helena that we acknowledge every one of you as our very own frontline key workers. Put simply, without your regular service bringing food, materials, equipment and medical goods, the life the community of St Helena enjoys would not be possible to continue.

This year has been especially difficult for many people and especially so for seafarers. We all recognise this. The COVID-19 pandemic and the national requirements for lengthy quarantine, lockdowns and massive travel disruptions have placed heavy personal burdens on those who work on the oceans. Throughout the crisis the MV Helena has been absolutely and unquestionably our most dependable partner. We do not under-estimate the remarkable lengths you have taken to maintain the service in spite of the new difficulties at ports, uncertainties with crew changeovers and the long months of isolation on board away from families and friends.

Today also marks the first decade for the Day of the Seafarer. On this 10th anniversary the role of seafarers and their ability to make international shipping work is even more prominent than in the past. It is only right that the visibility of what you normally do quietly in the background has its time today in the public spotlight.

The UN's International Maritime Organisation, headquartered in London, has asked this year for all Member States to recognise seafarers not only as key workers but to provide them with support, assistance and travel options where possible. Whilst we have our own difficulties with the latter over travel from our Island, we can offer our support and assistance to making your shipboard life more comfortable. This week the IEG decided that St Helena adjust its present COVID-19 regulations to allow any person, not just Island residents, to come on shore, subject to our normal immigration rules. And, for mariners in particular, to now permit seaborne time to be counted towards our 14 days quarantine requirements. This is similar to some other overseas territories. So, when a Captain is content, seafarers on board ships who have been away from port for 14 or more days and remained COVID-19 free will be able to come ashore and take some well-earned rest and recuperation on-Island.

I wish to mention the vital work of other ships that support our communities. The fuel ships that bring the petrol and diesel to St Helena quite literally allow us to keep the lights on and to travel conveniently around the Island. Ascension benefits from the quarterly visits of the MV Helena, as well as the British and American re-supply ships operated by the merchant navies to their military forces. The continuity of the very existence of Tristan da Cunha relies on the selfless service of seafarers crewing the MFV Edinburgh and MFV Geo Searcher. Like our own vessel here today, their Captain and crews have had to endure long months on board ship, unable to go ashore, unable to see families and friends, but have remained resilient and proud to provide the lifeline support to that remote community.

On this special day for seafarers let us not forget the 'land bound mariners' if that is a reasonable expression, the harbourmasters, the port and marine safety personnel, port security, sea rescue, stevedores, shipping agents, our fishermen and women and the Customs team. Each one of you contributes to maintaining a vibrant marine community and support to the key workers on the ocean-going ships that come to our islands.

I wish to end by thanking the Captain and crew of the MV Helena for your service and, on today of all days, to leave you in no doubt of the respect with which you are held by this Island. Thank you too for being extra vigilant working with St Helena to make sure the Island remains COVID-19 free. Let us all hope that next year, the 11th year of the Day of the Seafarer, will be held in more normal circumstances and those on board will be able to join us on the wharf. Until then, stay safe and we look forward to your return on the next voyage next month.

Thank you.

Philip Rushbrook
Governor of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha