

**THE XXII WORLD CONGRESS OF APOSTLESHIP OF THE
SEA – THE APPROACH TO THE OLD AND NEW
CHALLENGES AT MARITIME WORK –SITE**

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The XXII World Congress of the Apostleship of the Sea (AOS) was held in Poland, Gdynia from 24 to 29 June 2007, under high protection of Prof. Lech Kaczyński, the President of Poland. 270 delegates from over 60 countries participated: priests, deacons, religious lay members, maritime personnel, administrative and trade observers and guests.

The venue of the Congress was the Musical Theatre in Gdynia.

The formal opening was made by Archbishop Agostino Marchetto, Secretary of the Pontific Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, with His presentation about AOS as a mission towards all seafarers.

The current situation in the maritime world was presented by Mr David Cockroft, Secretary General of the International Transport Workers' Federation, with the stressing on today's challenges in the work at sea: isolation, job security, fatigue and so on. The state and role of AOS around the world were presented by Msgr. Jacques Harel and Felix Machado, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue. Tens of other analyses, descriptions and declarations were presented. Aside of general meetings, the round table was organized to discuss different problems, ecumenical, pastoral and related to the occupational and social aspects of the seafarers' work.

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The cooperation of kindred societies and civil organizations was presented by Rev. Dr Jorgen Katz, Chairman of the International Christian Maritime Association, and widely discussed with the participants. Among them the role of the International Committee on Seafarers' Welfare in sport, recreation and care for seafarers all over the world, was stressed by Mr Andrew Elliot, chairman of ICSW. Special attention was put on the ILO Maritime Convention (MLC 2006), and on the Work in Fishing Convention (WFC, 2007) by Mr Douglas B.Stevenson from the Seamen's Church Institute of New York. On the last day of the Congress, the final document as a Message to Seafarers has been presented and approved by the assembly.

Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, President of the PCMCMIP closed the Congress. His main message, devoted to maritime humanism, was addressed to maritime authorities, seafarers, priests, international representatives and organizers of workers' life at sea. The main theme to reflect on was :*"In Solidarity with the People of the Sea as Witnesses of Hope, through Proclamation of the World, Liturgy and Diakonia"*.

The event was designed and planned to be a pastoral meeting, but included also in the wide sense a lot of subjects inherent in the life and work at sea. It was intended to give the opportunity to different institutions as the Apostleship of the Sea and co-operating with it, to promote the spirituality and dignity of life at sea, as well as to contribute to safety in maritime work environment.

The National Centre of Maritime Medicine and the Clinic of Occupational and Internal Medicine, Interfaculty Institute of Maritime and Tropical Medicine in Gdynia, Medical University of Gdańsk was officially invited by organizers to participate in the Congress. As the reference centre on maritime medicine, we prepared and implemented the programme of medical lectures, training and round-table discussions on three consecutive days (26-27-28 June 2007). The programme included three initially selected and approved by organizers topics, reflecting some of the main challenges for maritime community.

They were shortly described in the Maritime Medical Problems Leaflet, distributed for official use at the Congress.

The main theses of the three lectures and educational sessions are presented below.

Subject: Health, life and work safety hazards on board

Moderator: Bogdan Jaremin MD, PhD,

Programme: Video presentations and discussion

Venue: Musical Theatre in Gdynia

1. Life loss due to hazards at the maritime work-site

Moderator: Bogdan Jaremin, MD, PhD

2. AIDS and tropical diseases among seafarers

Moderator: Andrzej Kotłowski, MD

3. Stress and work at sea

Moderator: Maria Jeżewska, PhD

4. Final comments: Bogdan Jaremin

Work at sea is still a real challenge. Together we might do more. Our objectives: to create the maritime work environment safer and healthier

1. Loss of life due to hazards at the maritime work-site:

Key words of the lecture were: **Main hazards** in the maritime work-site (physical, chemical, organizational and psycho-emotional factors, bad sea-conditions, lack of qualified medical assistance, delay in providing first aid and emergency disembarkation). **Causes of death:** external (70–80%; maritime catastrophes, collisions, drowning, other accidents – mainly among the young seafarers and ratings), internal (20–30%; circulatory – mainly among the older seafarers and officers, other infectious, gastro-intestinal, alcohol dependent diseases). **Relative risk** of death at sea (0.4–2.7/1000 employees/year), lower in national fleets, under ITF control, higher on flag of convenience ships; the highest among boat and cutter fishermen. About 65% of deaths at sea (accidents) considered as work-related accidents.

2. AIDS and tropical diseases among seafarers:

Key words of this session were: **HIV** infections and AIDS cases are constantly growing hazards among seafarers due to several psychosocial factors of work at sea (different attitude to the problem of faithfulness, confidence, sexual promiscuity etc.). Among tropical diseases in seafarers, **tropical malaria** (caused by *Plasmodium falciparum*) is the important cause of morbidity and mortality. It is necessary to implement proper **malaria prophylactic measures** according to the current WHO recommendations. The risk of acquiring other tropical diseases (leishmaniasis, schistosomiasis, filariasis, amoebiasis etc) is relatively low but seamen should be regularly controlled during **periodic medical examinations**, including routine coprological (stool) examination to diagnose and treat infections of the alimentary tract.

3. Stress and work at sea:

Key words for this session were: Seafarers experience stresses due to specific conditions of their work: high requirements and psychosocial factors, resulting in health and psychological problems. Work-related stress is connected with negative attitudes and behaviour of workers, having an adverse effect not only on their health but also on the shipping industry. For a worker, stress means worsening his general life quality,

well-being, health, and negatively affects his work. In everyday practice, a psychologist faces the following problems of seafarers: disturbances of behaviour, neurotic disturbances, psychosomatic problems, psychotic tendencies, alcoholism or other addictions. The stressors together with lowered resistance to stress and inability to manage it may cause a series of physiological and psychical disturbances. Therefore it is very important to achieve a high level of stress resistance capability. **Health promotion** at the workplace is of great concern. Medical examinations, psychological tests and training of skills and abilities should be performed for candidates for seafarers, as well as for seamen with long period of service at sea. It might be helpful for their successful career.

4. Our comments and recommendations:

In our meetings, different problems of the seafarers were presented and discussed, at three levels of involvement:

- **Technical and organizational:** implementation of ILO, WHO, IMO conventions and recommendations, ITF control and supervision, progress in ship construction/equipment.

Constant monitoring of the hazard level by: international organizations, national maritime administration and national centres of maritime medicine in a global network, further development of sea-rescue services.

- **Medical point of view:** **primary prevention** – better pre-sea examinations, **promotion** of healthy life style, education and training of maritime students, officers and ratings in pre-hospital interventions, **secondary prevention interventions** – training of para-medical teams on board, Medical Radio / tele-medicine, proper medicine chest, WHO International Medical Guide for Ships.

- **Specific pastoral contributions expected:** to strengthen by all possible means the cooperation with administration and centres of maritime medicine in: **promotion** of healthy life style, creation of harmonious coexistence among multi-national crew on board, **prevention** of alcoholism, other addictions and risky sexual behaviour, radio-contact and **mass transmission** for seafarers to promote hope and reduce loneliness, organization of **sport and recreation** in the ports called (IMSCW centres). **Care after seafarers' families**, assistance and participation in debriefing the victims of maritime catastrophes. Maritime funerals problem?

Other pastoral attendance was proposed by participants of the Congress in open discussions and briefings.

We believe that the Congress and our participation in it was a good and promising event, that enabled better cooperation on behalf of seafarers' community and safety at maritime work-site.

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