

Briefing by the IMO Secretary General

24 April 2026

The IMO Secretary-General (SG) convened a second briefing on 24 April 2026 for all Member State delegations and observer organisations to provide an update on the Strait of Hormuz situation, covering the current state of incidents, the evacuation framework, seafarer welfare, and broader coordination efforts.

Incidents and seized vessels

The SG reported that 29 vessels had been attacked following verification, resulting in 10 fatalities. With respect to seized vessels, the SG confirmed that securing the release of seafarers remains the overriding priority, and that efforts toward this objective are continuing.

Hazards in the region

The SG highlighted that the presence of mines constitutes a significant and ongoing risk. Mines are not confined to fixed locations, some are drifting, rendering large parts of the area unsafe for navigation.

Evacuation corridor

The SG confirmed that the evacuation framework has been developed on the basis of the IMO traffic separation scheme. Consultations have taken place with Member States, industry representatives, and seafarers' representatives on vessel prioritisation. The SG reiterated that the framework is focused exclusively on seafarer welfare and that cargo considerations play no part. Engagement with Iran and Oman, the two coastal States coordinating the corridor, is ongoing, particularly on operational aspects.

The SG stressed that implementation of the evacuation corridor is contingent on the provision of sufficient safety guarantees and noted that the conditions necessary for activation did not appear likely in the near future.

Freedom of navigation and tolls

The SG reaffirmed that freedom of navigation is non-negotiable and that any proposal to introduce tolls or transit fees is wholly unacceptable. He reiterated that the right of innocent passage applies through the IMO traffic separation scheme and must be respected by all parties.

Reopening of the Strait: a note of caution

The SG urged caution regarding announcements about the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, noting that attempts to rush transit had already led to incidents. Shipowners were strongly urged not to risk seafarers' lives, and the SG called for coordinated and responsible action from flag States, shipowners, ship operators, and all relevant stakeholders.

Broader coordination

The SG reported on the IMO's engagement across several international coordination mechanisms:

- The SG is a member of a task force developing a mechanism to ensure food security in the region.
- Members of the IMO Secretariat are participating in a trade and logistics working group and a crisis management team.
- The SG has been requested to brief the UN Security Council on maritime security in the region.

Seafarers' certificates

On a practical level, the SG noted that a document would be submitted to the next Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) addressing the validity and possible extension of seafarers' certificates, including training certification, to ensure that seafarers are not adversely affected upon returning to service.

Seafarer welfare

The SG warned that supply shortages are expected to occur in the near future. He expressed appreciation for the support provided by countries in the region and urged its continuation. He also underlined the importance of remote support mechanisms, such as helplines, to enable seafarers to maintain contact with their families. The SG further stressed the need for fair treatment and proper contractual conditions and raised concerns about a growing number of cases of abandonment.

Crew changes

The SG noted that some repatriations and crew changes have already taken place, with crew changes being conducted on the basis of seafarer availability and willingness. He also noted that the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) amendment recognising seafarers as key workers has not yet entered into force.

Response to questions

In response to questions from the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) regarding international efforts to facilitate crew changes and coordination with the UN humanitarian mechanism for fertiliser supply and food security, the SG provided the following clarifications:

- The evacuation corridor will remain operationally separate from any humanitarian corridor, with seafarer evacuation constituting the primary priority and humanitarian considerations to be addressed subsequently.
- Both the evacuation framework and the humanitarian mechanism will only become operational once meaningful de-escalation and safe conditions are in place.
- Efforts to advance both evacuation and food security objectives are being pursued in parallel.