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Sea piracy drops to 21-year low, IMB reports

London and Kuala Lumpur, July 2016 – Piracy and armed robbery at sea has fallen to its lowest levels since 1995, despite a surge in kidnappings off West Africa, according to a new report from the International Chamber of Commerce's International Maritime Bureau (IMB).

IMB's global piracy report shows 98 incidents in the first half of 2016, compared with 134 for the same period in 2015. When piracy was at its highest, in 2010 and 2003, IMB recorded 445 attacks a year.

In the first half of 2016, IMB recorded 72 vessels boarded, five hijackings, and a further 12 attempted attacks. Nine ships were fired upon. Sixty-four crew were taken hostage onboard, down from 250 in the same period last year.

"This drop in world piracy is encouraging news. Two main factors are recent improvements around Indonesia, and the continued deterrence of Somali pirates off East Africa," said Pottengal Mukundan, Director of IMB, whose global Piracy Reporting Centre has supported the shipping industry, authorities and navies for 25 years.

"But ships need to stay vigilant, maintain security and report all attacks, as the threat of piracy remains, particularly off Somalia and in the Gulf of Guinea," he said.

Nigeria the world's piracy kidnapping hotspot

Despite global improvements, kidnappings are on the rise, with 44 crew captured for ransom in 2016, 24 of them in Nigeria, up from 10 in the first half of 2015.

"In the Gulf of Guinea, rather than oil tankers being hijacked for their cargo, there is an increasing number of incidents of crew being kidnapped for ransom," said Captain Mukundan.

The Gulf of Guinea accounted for seven of the world's 10 kidnapping incidents, with armed gangs boarding vessels 30 to 120 NM from shore. Nigerian attacks are often violent, accounting for eight of the nine vessels fired upon worldwide. IMB says many further assaults go unreported by shipowners.

IMB reported two further kidnap incidents off Sabah, where tugs and barges were targeted. And in early June, a tug and barge were hijacked off Balingian, Sarawak in Malaysia and its palm oil cargo stolen.

Improvements in Indonesia

IMB's Piracy Reporting Centre has been working closely with the Indonesian authorities to improve security at sea and in ports.

Low-level theft to ships at anchor has been brought down by introducing designated anchorages with improved security. This has contributed to a fall in the number of incidents in Indonesia to 24 in the first six months of 2016, compared with 54 in the same period in 2015.

IMB also applauded the Indonesian Navy's prompt response in recovering a hijacked product tanker, south of Pulau Serutu, off west Kalimantan in May, saying: "This is exactly the type of robust response required in response to such threats." Nine pirates were apprehended and the crew of the tanker unharmed.

The IMB Piracy Reporting Centre is the world's only independent office to receive reports of pirate attacks 24-hours-a-day from across the globe. IMB strongly urges all shipmasters and owners to report all actual, attempted and suspected piracy and armed robbery incidents to the local authorities as well as the IMB Piracy Reporting Centre. This first step in the response chain is vital to ensuring that adequate resources are allocated by authorities to tackle piracy. Transparent statistics from an independent, non-political, international organization can act as a catalyst to achieve this goal.

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