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Message of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development for Sea Sunday

On the occasion of Sea Sunday, held today, 14 July 2019, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development has sent to chaplains, volunteers and supporters of the Apostleship of the Sea a message of gratitude, recalling the hard work that seafarers carry out all over the world.

The following is the text of the Message, signed by the prefect of the Dicastery, His Eminence Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson:

Message from Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson:

Sea Sunday Message (14th July 2019)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
beloved chaplains, volunteers, friends and supporters of the Apostleship of the Sea,

Though we do not realize it, the work of seafarers is essential for our daily lives because most of the possessions that we have in our houses, the television, the fridge, the washing machine, computer and phone, not to mention the fuel for our cars, the clothes we wear, and many other items are all made in distant parts of the world and brought to us by seafarers. So, it is proper that we pause for a moment to reflect how important and crucial seafarers are for our comfort and well-being.

For this reason, in various Christian Churches around the world the second Sunday of July is traditionally set aside as *Sea Sunday*. The faithful are requested to remember and pray for the 1.5 million seafarers who criss-cross the oceans and the seas, transporting almost 90% of goods from one nation to another.

The life of a seafarers, although it could appear attractive and interesting in the eyes of some people because

they sail around the world visiting numerous countries, in reality is full of challenges and hardships.

For their whole contract, seafarers are forced to live in the confined space of a vessel, for months at a time, away from their families and loved ones. Often their salaries are delayed and at least in one case, national legislation prevent seafarers from receiving cash while on board, leaving them penniless for the duration of their contract. Fast turnaround times in ports prevents them from going ashore to relax and release tensions from some of toughest working conditions, aggravated by the continuous threat of piracy and now also by the risk of terrorist attacks. In the case of maritime accidents, seafarers are often criminalized and detained without effective legal protection and the benefit of fair treatment. In a precarious mix of nationalities, cultures and religions the opportunities to interact socially with reduced number of crewmembers on board have diminished. Isolation and depression, combined with a lack of a supportive environment, affects the mental health of seafarers, sometimes with tragic and heartbreaking consequences for their families, crewmembers and ship-owners.

We acknowledge that with the ratification and implementation of several international Conventions and legislation, working and living conditions on board a great number of commercial vessels have improved. However, we cannot deny that in many parts of the world, where unscrupulous ship owners take advantage of less stringent enforcement of the law, the above-mentioned issues still strongly affect the life of many seafarers and their families.

Once again, I would like to call on International Organizations together with proper government authorities and the different players of the maritime world to renew their efforts to protect and safeguard the rights of all people working at sea.

I would like to encourage the chaplains and volunteers of Stella Maris/Apostleship of the Sea during their daily ship visits to be vigilant and approach each seafarer and fisher with the same committed spirit that animated the pioneers of our ministry when almost hundred years ago, on 4th October 1920, they decided to revive and restructure the widespread ministry of the Catholic Church for the people of the sea.

In the faces of seafarers from different nations, I invite you to recognize the face of Christ in your midst. In the confusion of languages, I recommend you to speak the language of Christian love that welcomes everyone and excludes no one. Confronted with abuses, I urge you not be afraid to denounce injustices and advocate *“to work together to build the common good and a new humanism of work, to promote work that respects the dignity of the person who does not only look at profit or production needs but promotes a dignified life knowing that the good of the people and the good of the company go hand in hand”* (Pope Francis, 7 September 2018).

Finally, let us entrust your ministry to Mary, *Star of the Sea*, that she continues to strengthen, inspire and guide every action of chaplains and volunteers and to extend her maternal protection and assistance to all the people of the sea.

Cardinal Peter K. A. Turkson
Prefect
