

IMO Secretary-General Koji Sekimizu has pledged IMO's support for the Philippines in all facets of the country's maritime development. In wide-ranging talks in Manila with Philippines' President Benigno S. Aquino III, as well as the country's Secretaries for Foreign Affairs, Transport and Communication, and Labour and Employment, Mr Sekimizu expressed his appreciation for the efforts made by the Government of the Philippines to provide a continuous supply of competent seafarers to the global shipping community. He also affirmed IMO's commitment to provide the Philippines with assistance in all aspects of its maritime development, including the fields of education, training, and certification of seafarers under the STCW Convention.

The Secretary-General spoke of his vision of a wider approach to technical co-operation, which would be based directly on the identification, through detailed country profiles, of the individual maritime needs of each developing country. He further promised IMO's support for the Philippines' efforts to formulate a national maritime transport strategy, which would provide a springboard for the development of maritime clusters in the country, comprising seafaring, ship building and repair, and ship management.

Mr Sekimizu and the Secretary of Transport and Communication, Mr Mar Roxas, agreed to establish an informal channel of communication between IMO and the Philippine Government, specifically to address any matters arising from the implementation of the STCW Convention and the 2010 Manila amendments, with a view to improving the mechanism for addressing certification issues.

Emphasizing IMO's determination to improve counter-piracy measures off the coast of Somalia, the Secretary-General extended an invitation to the Philippines to send a delegation to the forthcoming Capacity-building Conference on Counter-Piracy, to be held at IMO on 15 May, followed by a High Level Segment on the opening day (16 May 2012) of the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), to discuss the issue of arms on board ships.

Mr Sekimizu also met leaders of the Philippine maritime industry, whom he commended for their contribution, through the supply of 25 per cent of the world's seafarers, to the economic growth of the Philippines and of Asia as a whole. Noting the significant role of national shipping within the Philippine archipelago, he encouraged the industry to take appropriate action to ensure the safety of domestic navigation. He also urged the industry as a whole to take steps, wherever possible, to raise public awareness of the maritime industry and its importance to the world economy.

At the conclusion of his visit, Mr Sekimizu said he had been encouraged by the steps being taken by the Philippine authorities to ratify a number of IMO instruments. He also felt reassured, throughout his meetings with government officials, by the determination of the Philippine Government to continue to ensure the compliance of its seafarers with the required standards of competence prescribed under the STCW Convention.

IMO Secretary-General Sekimizu visited the Philippines from 7 to 8 February 2012, in his first official mission to a Member State since he took office on 1 January 2012. This can be seen as a clear indication of the priority he places on seafarer-related matters, and as a recognition of the key role which seafarers play in the Philippines and the maritime community.