

SEAFARERS' RELIEF FUND REACHES \$530,000 IN PLEDGES TOWARDS COVID-19 SEAFARER CRISIS; \$400,000 IN GRANTS ISSUED

Grants to be put to work in India, including the purchase of oxygenators, estimated to save approximately 60 lives a month, but more funds needed The Seafarers International Relief Fund (SIRF), established by leading seafarer welfare charities and the wider shipping industry to support seafarers and their families devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has collected \$530,000 in pledges so far, and thanks to The Seafarers' Charity's agile and established grant-making processes, has already issued grants of almost \$400,000 to help those worst affected.

The first three SIRF grants will provide funds to three seafarer charities, Stella Maris, Sailors' Society and The Mission to Seafarers.

The Stella Maris grant will fund work in the Indian port of Cochin to purchase 10 oxygenators, which will prevent an estimated 60 lives a month from being lost to COVID-19, amid a drastic shortage of oxygen tanks in hospitals. In addition, 1,100 food parcels - each sufficient to feed a family of five for one month - will be purchased and distributed. Funding will also be invested in post-COVID-19 care, counselling and therapy.

Sailors' Society's grant will be used to purchase and distribute 5,000 COVID Care Kits to seafarers across 10 Indian ports. The kits can be used by seafarers and their family members to give early warning signs of illness - reaching 5,000 seafarers, as well as 20,000 seafarers' dependents.

The Mission to Seafarers' grant was awarded to support a food ingredients programme in Thoothukudi (formerly Tuticorin), Southern India, where many seafarers are experiencing difficulty in taking up new employment contracts, causing severe financial difficulties. The programme will provide 1,350 seafarers with ingredients such as rice, dhal, oil, fruit and vegetables, helping to meet their basic nutritional needs for 15 days. Indian Ayurvedic remedies to boost immunity are also being provided, as is hand sanitiser and PPE equipment.

Speaking on behalf of the relief fund, Catherine Spencer, Chief Executive of The Seafarers' Charity, commented: "We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of the shipping industry and beyond to get behind this united effort, and reaching a total of US\$530,000 in only three weeks is a tremendous effort, and an example of how a truly united approach can make an impact. "To see these grants being issued securely and swiftly will genuinely save many lives, and for that we are very grateful to our donors. However, we need more funds! We have set an ambitious target of US\$1m, and aim to meet it - so we continue to ask the shipping industry, its customers and consumers to dig deep - and pledge today towards something that is having a very real and tangible impact in saving and protecting lives."

Martin Foley, Chief Executive Officer of Stella Maris, said: "Stella Maris is proud to be one of the first beneficiaries of the Seafarers' International Relief Fund to support seafarers and their families. This grant will save lives through the purchase of oxygenators, enable the support of over 1,100 families with food as well as providing essential rehabilitation to those directly affected by COVID-19. Thank you to all in the maritime community who gave to the Seafarers' International Relief Fund who made this grant possible."

Sailors' Society CEO Sara Baade said: "During this devastating latest COVID wave in India, we've been particularly concerned for the health of seafaring communities, many of which have a real need for basic medical equipment, medicines and information on how to recognise and respond to COVID symptoms. "Preventative support is crucial at the moment to ensure the already overcrowded hospitals are not totally overwhelmed, so we are delighted to be able to provide these care kits to seafarers and their families and very grateful to the Seafarers' International Relief Fund for funding the initial roll-out."

Andrew Wright, Secretary-General of The Mission to Seafarers, commented: "The Mission to Seafarers is deeply grateful for this grant and thankful to all who have made it possible. Prompted by the desperate situation of so many in India, especially seafarers and their families, this new emergency fund is ground-breaking. Both now and in the future, it will provide the industry and the maritime welfare organisations with a shared fund to enable a swift and effective response to disaster situations. We have been delighted to be involved with a long-overdue development."

A growing number of shipping organisations have pledged their support to the fund, including Hafnia, Hong Kong Seafarers Mutual Assistance Fund, Hansa Tankers Management, Liberian Shipowners Council and Thome Group. One of the donors to the SIRF appeal, Hafnia, commented: "The current COVID-19 situation in India, and for seafarers in general, is a tragedy. It is therefore encouraging to see the industry coming together to provide support during this time of need. In Hafnia we felt we must do the same. We chose to do this through the Seafarers' International Relief Fund as many of our seafarers call India home. We want to do what we can to support seafarers and their families during this pandemic."

The fund has been established by leading international seafarer welfare organisations - The Seafarers' Charity and supported by The Mission to Seafarers, ISWAN, Sailors' Society, Stella Maris, ICMA and other charities - to raise \$1 million in a united appeal to deliver urgent support to seafarers and their families. Although the focus of the campaign is currently India, other countries remain highly vulnerable to the pandemic, including those with large numbers of seafarers.

The goal of the SIRF is to stand ready to support seafarers and their families in other countries, should the need arise. 100% of the SIRF donations to date will directly help seafarers in dire need due to COVID-19. More applications for SIRF grants from those working on the ground in the midst of the pandemic are expected, and with so much more that needs to be done to save lives and protect livelihoods, SIRF urgently needs further financial support. To contribute to the Seafarers International Relief Fund, please visit <https://donate.theseafarerscharity.org/sirf> . Alternatively, email keziah.cunningham@theseafarerscharity.org or call +44 (0) 20 7932 0000.