

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, a very good afternoon to you all. My name is Helen Buni and I lead the Women in Maritime programme at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) based here in London.

Congratulations to MTCC Africa, supported by the Government of Kenya for organizing this timely webinar. It's a real challenge to speak after some many eminent speakers, especially as they have set the scene so eloquently and said much of what I wanted to say. I am especially pleased because the topics you have selected to address in today's webinar – women and decarbonization – are not only high on the agenda of IMO but also very important to me, personally. The common thread of Africa as a continent and women in maritime as key stakeholders – is that of untapped potential.

This year's World Maritime theme Sustainable Shipping for a Sustainable Planet, allows us to reflect on the opportunities but also on our responsibilities in building a sustainable future for the maritime industries. Not only does the theme provide the opportunity to raise awareness of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and showcase the work that the IMO and its Member States are undertaking to achieve the targets but in the wake of COVID-19, the 2020 theme is a striking reminder of the professionalism and sacrifice of the world's two million merchant fleet seafarers who continue to transport more than 80% of world trade amidst the pandemic.

The 2020 theme is a wake-up call regarding the undeniable importance of shipping to the global economy. Now is the time to emphasize that role and ensure that we do have a sustainable planet for a sustainable future, which in turn calls for a sustainable shipping industry.

For sustainability and success in the modern world, shipping needs more women in the workforce and women helping drive the decision-making processes. Think maritime - think women: perhaps not the usual slogan that we are used to seeing in our traditionally male-dominated industry. IMO's Women in Maritime Programme has been running for more than three decades to support the participation of women in the sector. The maritime industry relies on the human element for its safety and success. How then can it afford to limit its pool of resources by excluding women?

Women in Maritime – access for women to high-level technical training and also IMO has facilitated the creation of professional networks to improve gender balance in the shipping industry. Under IMO's auspices, seven Women in Maritime Associations (WIMAs) have been established in Africa, Arab States, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific, covering some 152 countries and dependent territories. Access to these regional maritime associations for women provides members with a platform to discuss a number of issues, not just about gender, but also technical issues. These associations could go some way to bridging the gap in narrowing some of the institutional barriers and cultural stigma facing women who enter the maritime industry. Through IMO, each regional network has established national chapters which have delivered maritime career days and various activities, such as information on HIV prevention and sexual health; and beach clean ups.

In these unprecedented times, being part of a network, supporting each other, sharing best practices and knowing that you are not facing these uncertain times alone, has never been more important or relevant. I am delighted that WOMESA Chair is here today, supports this approach by providing a platform for networking and mentorship for women in maritime to bridge the gender equality gap in the maritime industry.

To change the balance, we need to make sure that the next generation of girls and boys know that there is an opportunity to work in the maritime industry in the first place. Here IMO

networks can play a pivotal role in showcasing role models and mentoring the next generation. WMU, IMLI graduates.

Prof Attard, moving muscle to the brain.... Decarbonization, digitalization, new technologies (Ai), means that there has never been a more important time for women to join the maritime industry, new job opportunities. Role models and visibility are such an important thing, women in STEM open opportunities for women in maritime. Naval architects, engineers etc...

2020 was intended to be a pivotal year for the global gender equality agenda and global climate change ambition. It was supposed to be a year to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and to celebrate the start of the Paris Agreement. Yet, the unexpected and rapid spread of Covid-19 pandemic has set in our paths a mammoth challenge. The ensuing economic slowdown and the postponement of the UN Climate Conference to 2021 threaten to stall the world's commitments to climate action. Challenges comes opportunities; however, this is also an opportunity to better understand the links between pandemics such as COVID-19 and climate change and ensure that we rebuild from this crisis inclusively, equitably and sustainably. Leaving no-one behind.

Twenty-five years since the Beijing Declaration, the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights, no country has fully delivered on the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action, nor is close to it. A major stock-taking UN Women report published earlier this year showed that progress towards gender equality is faltering and hard-won advances are being reversed. Women currently hold just one quarter of the seats at the tables of power across the board. Men are still 75 per cent of parliamentarians, hold 73 per cent of managerial positions, are 70 per cent of climate negotiators and almost all of the peacemakers.

This webinar comes at a time when the impact of the gender equality gaps is undeniable. Research shows the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating pre-existing inequalities and threatening to halt or reverse the gains of decades of collective effort – with just released new data revealing that the pandemic will push 47 million more women and girls below the poverty line. We are also witnessing increased reports on violence against women throughout the world due to the lockdowns, and women losing their livelihoods faster because they are more exposed to hard-hit economic sectors.

At this juncture, let me pledge IMO's continued support and time-bound actions to advance the role of women in maritime, in particular, on decarbonization through its networks for women in maritime through training-visibility and recognition.

My heartfelt congratulations and support go to MTCC Africa for forming strategic partnerships with IMO Women in Maritime networks such as WOMESA, in showcasing strong and talented women in maritime, challenging old-fashioned perceptions and proving that in today's world the maritime industries are for everyone.

We must all take collective responsibility to ensure a sustainable planet for future generations. Let us build on the lessons learnt and move forward together.

- Increase strategic partnerships.
- IMO-WISTA International Study on the number of Women in Maritime.
- Speakers' bureau.
- *Building on the momentum of the 2019 WMT Empowering Women in the Maritime Community: Preserving the Legacy of the World Maritime Theme for 2019 and achieving a Barrier-Free Working Environment for Women in the Maritime Sector".* IMO Assembly resolution urging further firm action in coming years to advance gender equality throughout the maritime sector and reach a barrier-free environment.

- Moves are also underway to address diversity and representation issues, including gender, LGBTI, disability and intersectionality. Internally, IMO has recently established a cross-divisional Gender and Diversity Group to establish an institutional framework within IMO with a view to creating an enabling work environment that embraces equality, diversity and reduces bias for all IMO staff.

I sincerely hope that I get the opportunity to meet with you in person, soon. Until then, stay safe and best wishes from a small tenacious UN agency on the banks of the river Thames.
