Focus on IMO

January 2000

Piracy and armed robbery at sea

In October 1999 the cargo ship **Alondra Rainbow** left the Indonesian port of Kuala Tanjung bound for the port of Mike in Japan. She never arrived. Instead the ship was boarded by armed pirates who put the 17 crew members in an inflatable liferaft and set them adrift. Although they were passed by six ships, it was not until eleven days later that they were finally rescued by fishermen.

It must have been a terrifying experience, but the crew of the **Alondra Rainbow** were lucky. In September 1998, the Panama-registered **Tenyu** also disappeared in the Straits of Malacca while en route from Indonesia for the Republic of Korea with a cargo of aluminium ingots. She later reappeared, but with a different name and crew. It is almost certain that her original crew of 17 were murdered.

In November 1998 the bulk carrier **MV Cheung Son** was attacked by pirates in the South China Sea. Her crew of 23 were shot and their bodies thrown overboard, weighted down to make them sink. Not all did so. Fishermen off the coast of China later found six bodies in their nets, still bound and gagged.

These attacks would be shocking if they were isolated cases. But according to reports compiled by IMO, between 1984 and the end of November 1999 there had been 1,587 attacks by pirates on ships around the world. In some areas these attacks involved a disturbing increase in violence. The IMO figures show that, between June and November 1999 one security guard was killed, one crew member went missing, thirteen crew members were assaulted and thirteen others were taken hostage, while two ships were hijacked or destroyed.

To most people, the surprising thing is not that piracy can be violent, but that it is happening at all. Although piracy has existed almost as long as shipping and trade, it seemed by the end of the 19th century that it had at last been eliminated. In more recent times it was regarded as an interesting historical problem, associated with the skull and crossbones flag, galleons of gold and villains carrying cutlasses: wicked, but with a dash of excitement and even romance. The fact that piracy was always a crime, often vicious and usually murderous, was forgotten or ignored.

In fact piracy had not disappeared. During the 1970s and 1980s attacks on merchant ships began to increase. They were often small in scale and rarely involved physical injury to those who were attacked. But it was a problem that soon could no longer be ignored.

What is piracy?

The following definition of piracy is contained in article 101 of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):

Piracy consists of any of the following acts:

(a) any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft, and directed:

(i) on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft;

(ii) against a ship, aircraft, persons or property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any State;

(b) any act of voluntary participation in the operation of a ship or of an aircraft with knowledge of facts making it a pirate ship or aircraft;

(c)any act inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act described in sub-paragraph (a) or (b).

It is clear that many acts of violence against ships, especially those that occur in ports or territorial waters are not regarded as "piracy" under international law. They are therefore classified as "armed robbery".

Piracy becomes a problem

In 1983 Sweden submitted a paper to the Maritime Safety Committee (MSC), IMO's most senior technical body, which stated that piratical attacks had grown to such an extent that the situation had become "alarming". Most attacks at that time were taking place at night on ships anchored off the coast of West Africa, usually waiting for a berth in port. The International Maritime Bureau, which had been established by the International Chamber of Commerce in 1979, mainly to deal with maritime fraud, said that similar attacks had been recorded as far back as 1970.

After discussing the matter, the MSC prepared a draft text which was used as the basis for a resolution adopted by the IMO Assembly when it met in November 1983 (resolution A.545(13)).

The resolution notes with great concern the increasing number of incidents involving piracy and armed robbery and recognizes the grave danger to life and the grave navigational and environmental risks to which such incidents can give rise.

It then 'urges Governments concerned to take, as a matter of highest priority, all measures necessary to prevent and suppress acts of piracy and armed robbery from ships in or adjacent to their waters, including strengthening of security measures.'

The resolution 'invites Governments concerned and interested organizations to advise shipowners, ship operators, shipmasters and crews on measures to be taken to prevent acts of piracy and armed robbery and minimise the effects of such acts.' It further invites Governments and organizations concerned to inform IMO of action taken to implement the aims of the resolution and recommends Governments concerned to inform IMO of any act of piracy or armed robbery committed against a ship flying the flag of their country, indicating the location and circumstances of the incident.

Finally, it requests the IMO Council to keep the matter under review and take such further action as it may consider necessary in the light of developments.

In April 1984, the MSC established "Piracy and armed robbery against ships" as a separate and fixed item in its work programme. The Committee decided that as a first step it would be necessary to have an indication of the scale of the problem, the areas in which attacks were prevalent and as much other information as possible. Under this agenda item, the Committee receives a summary of all reports on piracy and armed robbery against ships submitted by Member Governments and international organizations in consultative status.

The reports contained, where available, the names and descriptions of the ships attacked, their positions and times of attack, consequences to the crew, ship or cargo and actions taken by the crew and coastal States to which the incidents were reported. The reports were compiled at first twice a year, then quarterly and now they are circulated monthly, with quarterly and annual summariesIn 1986, the MSC decided that reports on piracy and armed robbery against ships received by the Secretariat, should be forwarded to the port or coastal States concerned, for comments and advice on the actions they had taken with regard to the incidents reported and that any relevant information provided by the coastal States should be reported to its future sessions.

In view of the continuing rise in the number of such unlawful acts reported and realizing that many others are not brought to the attention of the Organization, the IMO Assembly in 1991 adopted resolution A.683(17) - Prevention and suppression of acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships, which urged Member Governments to report to the Organization all incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships under their flags and invited coastal States to increase their efforts to prevent and suppress such acts committed in their waters.

As at the end of November 1999, 1,587 incidents had been reported to IMO. However, IMO estimates that incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships are under-reported by a factor of two. Several reasons have been suggested, including fear that a successful act of piracy will reflect on the master's competence; concern that such a report would embarrass the State in whose territorial waters the act occurred (the coastal State); the belief that an investigation would disrupt the vessel's schedule; and the possibility that shipowners' insurance would increase.

A global threat

Since piracy became a major international problem two decades ago it has occurred in a number of areas.

West Africa

Between 1982 and 1986, West Africa - particularly Nigeria - had the highest reported number of cases of piracy and armed robbery. About 25 cases were reported annually, mainly against ships at anchor awaiting berth. Typically, a gang of up 10 people

would board the ship at night, threaten the crew with knives, overpower them and then go on to break into cargo containers and steal their contents.

Between 1984 and 1985, the Nigerian authorities, using the combined resources of the navy, police and customs, collected enough intelligence to swoop on piracy bases and the outlets which were used for disposing of the stolen goods. The result was dramatic because by 1986, only occasional isolated incidents were reported from Lagos and Bonny ports, which had been the hot spots for such attacks. However, in 1998 22 incidents were reported in West Africa.

Malacca Strait

Prior to 1989, the Malacca Strait was considered to be relatively safe. About seven cases of piracy and armed robbery were reported annually from the area, but in 1989, the figure rose to 28 and by 1991, it had gone up to about 50 a year.

The Malacca Strait gave particular cause for concern because it is one of the busiest waterways in the world, used by up to 200 ships daily. The Strait, in some stretches, is shallow and narrow and requires precise navigation. Most of the attacks in the region were on ships underway.

The pattern used by the pirates was to board a steaming ship at night, undetected and make their way to the ship's bridge. Once there, they would overpower the officer of the navigational watch and either tie him up or hand cuff him to the rail while the rest of the gang made for the master's and crew cabins to demand money and valuables. Apart from the danger to the crew of the ship under attack, there was the horrifying hazard posed by a ship often carrying dangerous cargoes, steaming at full speed, unattended, in confined waters.

At the initiative of the Secretary-General of IMO, Mr William A. O'Neil, a Working Group composed of experts from ten IMO Member countries, including experts from the three littoral States of the Malacca Strait (Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore), was established in 1992, to prepare a report outlining the problem in the Strait of Malacca. Among other things, the report was to contain recommendations on safety precautions and enforcement arrangements appropriate for crews, shipowners, flag States, coastal States and port States (individually or collectively on a regional basis) for dealing with piracy and armed robbery against ships.

While the Working Group was instructed to focus on the situation in the areas around the Malacca Strait, it was also instructed to prepare recommendations which could be applied in other parts of the world affected by piracy and armed robbery. The Working Group visited Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, between February and March 1993, and prepared a report covering navigation, radiocommunications, search and rescue and piracy and armed robbery in the Malacca Strait region.

This was considered by the MSC at its sixty-second session in May 1993 and two circulars were issued as a result. The first one (MSC/Circ. 622) contained *Recommendations to Governments for preventing and suppressing piracy and armed robbery against ships.* The second (MSC/Circ. 623) contains *Guidance to shipowners and ship operators, shipmasters and crews on preventing and suppressing acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships* (see panels for a description of the two circulars).

Later that year, the IMO Assembly adopted a new resolution A.738(18) recommending additional measures to prevent and suppress piracy and armed robbery against ships. The new resolution:

- recommended that masters of ships immediately report attacks or threats of attack to the nearest rescue and co-ordination centre and request such co-ordination centres to immediately warn shipping in the immediate vicinity of the attack, as well as inform promptly the local security forces to implement any contingency plans they have for dealing with such incidents;

- requested the Maritime Safety Committee to adopt a special signal for use by ships under attack or threat of attack. IMO, working in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the International Mobile Satellite Organization (Inmarsat) has included "Piracy/armed robbery attack" as a category of distress message which ships can now transmit through either their DSC (Digital Selective Calling) or Inmarsat equipment by pressing a button. The message can be received automatically by shore stations and ships in the vicinity.

- an invitation and recommendation to shipmasters to use such facilities was circulated to Member Governments by MSC/Circ.805 of 6 June 1997. But masters of ships under attack or threat of attack are warned about using the facility if they have been ordered by the pirates to maintain radio silence. This is because there is equipment available capable of detecting all radio signals, including satellite communications, to which the pirates may have access.

Prior to the establishment of the Working Group, the three littoral States of the Malacca Strait (Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore), in response

to the concerns expressed by IMO, had started implementing a co-ordinated patrol and other counter-measures in the region. These measures, which started in 1992, resulted in a marked decline in the number attacks in the region. In 1998 six incidents were reported in the Malacca Strait.

South China Sea

Just as the situation was improving in the Malacca Strait, it was deteriorating in the South China Sea. Statistics compiled over the 7-month period from May to December 1993, showed that 42 incidents were reported in the East and South China Sea out of 67 world-wide. Most of the attacks took place in international waters and in some cases firearms were used.

A number of reports described persons attempting to stop and board the ships in the guise of officials or wearing uniforms. It has not been possible to confirm whether those involved were officials acting within their jurisdiction, officials acting outside their normal duties or private individuals dressed as officials. In the majority of the cases, such persons were armed with low velocity weapons such as pistols and in a number of cases with assault rifles.

Fishing vessels, particularly around the Philippines, also received the attention of pirates and armed robbers. Very often they were waylaid by faster boats that came alongside without stopping them. The attacking boat would synchronise its speed with that of its target and the armed bandits would simply climb over the gunwale of the ship under attack, leaving some gang members in their boats as guards. The bandits operated swiftly and accurately, taking the fish catch, boat engines, fuel, personal effects, or worse, the boat itself.

Effective law enforcement is difficult in the area of the South China Sea because of its vastness (more than 200 miles wide) and the fact that it is dotted with several uninhabited islands to which the pirates can retreat. The problem has been exacerbated by the lack of co-operation, particularly exchange of information, between the law enforcement agencies of the neighbouring countries and some disputes over territorial limits.

Against this background and in response to a request by the Maritime Safety Committee for a report on the situation in the South China Sea, in March 1994 IMO sent a fact-finding mission to China, the Philippines and Hong Kong. The mission provided an opportunity to discuss with senior officials in the three countries the help which IMO could provide to their enforcement agencies in preparing measures to prevent and deal with piracy in their waters. Even so, the South

China Sea remains a problem area. Of the 210 cases reported worldwide in 1998, incidents in the South China Sea accounted for 98.

South America

Attacks have been reported in various ports in South America including Colombia, Venezuela, the Guianas and the Caribbean. A total of 38 attacks were reported in 1998. Attacks usually occur in ports or anchorages and occasionally, extreme violence has been reported.

The situation today

Despite the efforts of IMO and its member states, piracy has remained a major threat to shipping in several parts of the world. In October 1998, therefore, experts were sent to South East Asia and Central and South America to discuss the situation and consider counter-measures.

The South East Asia group visited Manila (Philippines), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) and Jakarta (Indonesia). The mission was undertaken against some disturbing statistics showing that, over the period from 1995 to the present, 244 incidents took place in the South China Sea and Malacca Strait areas out of 715 worldwide. Of the incidents reported in the two areas:

- 86.5% had taken place in territorial waters or within ports;
- 56% concerned ships at anchor or at berth; in 23% of the reported incidents, violence had been used and in 16% violence had been threatened.

The principal purpose of the mission was to increase awareness of the problem; impress upon the Governmental representatives concerned the need for action; and, more importantly, motivate political will to act at national and regional levels.

The mission was followed up by a seminar held in Singapore in February 1999. High-level Governmental representatives of the countries visited participated in the meetings, which were characterized by an open and frank exchange of views and clear expressions of political will to act at national and regional.

The second mission visited the Brazilian ports of Santos and Rio de Janeiro in October 1998. Between those two visits, a seminar and workshop on piracy and armed robbery against ships was conducted in Brasilia, which was attended by representatives of the Governments of Brazil, Colombia, Panama, Suriname and Venezuela and observers from Chile, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay.

The main objective of the Brasilia seminar was to improve safety at sea by assisting Governments to

implement the guidelines annexed to MSC circulars 622 and 623 which were issued in 1993 (see above). It also aimed at considering the development of co-operation agreements between neighboring countries for co-ordinated patrols and other appropriate measures.

During evaluation of the national reports on the piracy/armed robbery situation in their countries presented by the delegations attending the seminar and workshop, two important characteristic of the prevailing situation in Latin America, emerged:

- the modus operandi of pirates and armed robbers substantially differs from that in the Far East region with most of the attacks in Latin America taking place while ships are at berth or at anchor; and

- drug-related piracy may increase in future unless a concerted effort is promptly undertaken by the countries concerned.

The seminar and workshop, whilst recognizing that, with the involvement of a considerable number of national authorities sharing responsibility on the issue, bureaucracy was inevitable, agreed that co-ordination of any activity undertaken in this respect should be vigorously sought at all levels.

MSC 71: May 1999

The MSC discussed piracy and armed robbery at its seventy-first session in May 1999, including the outcome of the two missions to South America and South East Asia. It noted that the main problems in dealing with pirates and armed robbers were:

- the economic situation prevailing in the regions concerned
- resources constraints on law enforcement agencies
- lack of communication and co-operation between the agencies involved
- the time taken to respond after an incident has been reported
- general problems in reporting incidents, such as alerting the nearest coastal State as well as other ships in the area of a ship under attack or threat of attack
- timely and proper investigation of incidents
- prosecution or pirates and armed robbers when apprehended
- lack of regional co-operation.

The Committee's main conclusions were incorporated into the revised MSC Circulars 622 and 623.One conclusion reached as a result of the two missions was the need for more effective action in apprehending and prosecuting pirates. The Committee agreed to develop a draft Code for the investigation of cases involving violence against crews, passengers, ships or cargoes, to be considered at the MSC's seventy-second session in May 2000.

The aim of the Code will be to promote a common approach to the investigation of cases involving violence against ships and those on board and to promote co-operation between States in the course of these investigations.

IMO recommendations
Recommendations to Governments for preventing and suppressing piracy and armed robbery against ships (MSC/Circ. 622/rev. 1)

The circular, first issued in 1993, was revised in 1999 on the basis of recommendations made by regional seminars in Brasilia, Brazil in 1998 and Singapore in 1999. The circular recommends that "before embarking on any set of measures or recommendations, it is imperative for governmental or other agencies concerned to gather accurate statistics of the incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships, to collate these statistics under both type and area and to assess the nature of the attacks with special emphasis on types of attack, accurate geographical location and modus operandi of the wrongdoers and to disseminate or publish these statistics to all interested parties in a format that is understandable and usable."

The circular says that representatives of shipowners and seafarers should also be involved in developing counter-measures. States should develop Action Plans on preventing and responding to attacks and also on dealing with any pollution that might result from an attack (for example, as a result of a collision or grounding). The necessary infrastructure and operational arrangements should be established to prevent and suppress piracy and armed robbery against ships.

An incident command system for tactical as well as operational response should be set up and be integrated with other security matters, such as smuggling, drug trafficking and terrorism. It is imperative that all attacks or threats of attacks are reported to the local rescue co-ordination centre (RCC) or coast radio station. The RCC should in turn inform local security authorities and other ships in the area.

The recommendations go on to deal with how to investigate piracy incidents and criminal jurisdiction. They give guidance to coastal States in areas that are affected by piracy on action to be taken, including the establishment of regional agreements to facilitate a co-ordinated response to attacks. A draft agreement is given in an annex.

Guidance to shipowners and ship operators, shipmasters and crews on preventing and suppressing acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships (MSC/Circ.623/Rev. 1)

This recommendation was also first adopted in 1993 and revised in 1999. It outlines steps that should be taken to reduce the risk of such attacks, possible responses to them and the vital need to report attacks, both successful and unsuccessful, to the authorities of the relevant coastal State and to the ships' own maritime Administration.

The circular states that the main targets of the South East Asian attacker appear to be cash in the ship's safe, crew possessions and any other portable ship's equipment, even including coils of rope. In South America some piracy and armed robbery attacks are drug related. When there has been evidence of tampering with containers, it has been suggested that the raiders may initially have gained access when the ship was berthed in port and then gone over the side, with what they could carry. Thorough checking of ships' compartments and securing before leaving ports is therefore recommended.

The circular stresses the need to reduce temptation for pirates and armed robbers. The belief that large sums of cash are carried in the master's safe attracts attackers. On several occasions this belief has been justified and substantial sums have been stolen. While carrying cash may sometimes be necessary to meet operational needs and crew requirements and to overcome exchange control restrictions in some States, it acts as a magnet for attackers and they will intimidate the master or crew members until the locations have been revealed. Shipowners should consider ways of eliminating the need to carry large sums of cash on board ship. When this need arises because of exchange control restrictions imposed by States, the matter should be referred to the ship's maritime Administration to consider if representations should be made to encourage a more flexible approach as part of the international response to eliminate attacks by pirates and armed robbers.

The circular says: "Masters should bear in mind the possibility that attackers are monitoring ship-to-shore communications and using intercepted information to select their targets. Caution should, therefore, be exercised when transmitting information on cargo or valuables on board by radio in areas where attacks occur. Members of the crew going ashore in ports in affected areas should be advised not to discuss the voyage or cargo particulars with persons unconnected with the ships business."

The circular recognizes that the "smaller crew numbers now found on board ships also favour the attacker. A small crew engaged in ensuring the safe navigation of their ship through congested or confined waters will have the additional onerous task of maintaining high levels of security surveillance for prolonged periods. Shipowners will wish to consider enhancing security watches if their ship is in waters or at anchor off ports, where attacks occur. Shipowners will wish to consider providing appropriate surveillance and detection equipment to aid their crews and protect their ships."

The circular goes on to list a series of recommended practices which are based on reports of incidents, advice published by commercial organizations and measures developed to enhance ship security. The extent to which the recommendations are followed or applied are matters solely for the owners or master of ships operating in areas where attacks occur

All ships expected to operate in waters where attacks occur should have a ship security plan, which should cover such matters as:

- the need for enhanced surveillance and the use of lighting, surveillance and detection equipment;
- crew responses, if a potential attack is detected or an attack is underway;
- the radio alarm procedures to be followed; and
- the reports to be made after an attack or an attempted attack.

Ship security plans should ensure that masters and crews are made fully aware of the risks involved during attacks by pirates or armed robbers. In particular, they should address the dangers that may arise if a crew adopts an aggressive response to an attack. Although some observers have claimed that the crews of merchant ships should be armed in areas where piracy attacks are likely the circular states: "Aggressive responses, once an attack is underway and, in particular, once the attackers have boarded the ship, could significantly increase the risk to the ship and those on board."

The circular covers such matters as precautions in port or at anchor, watchkeeping and vigilance, communications procedures, radio watchkeeping and responses including message formats.

The circular recommends using the maximum lighting possible when operating at night and says that, on balance, the idea of a total blackout cannot be recommended. It stresses the importance of establishing secure areas which attackers will find difficult to penetrate. When the ship is underway, "masters should consider "riding off" attackers craft by heavy wheel movements as they approach.

The effect of the bow wave and wash may deter would-be attackers and make it difficult for them to attach poles or grappling irons to the ship."

The use of fire hoses should be considered. "Water pressures of 80 lb per square inch and above have deterred and repulsed attackers. Not only does the attacker have to fight against the jet of water but the flow may swamp his/her boat and damage engines and electrical systems."

The circular warns that employing evasive manoeuvres and hoses "could lead to reprisals by the attackers if they seize crew members and should not be engaged in unless the master is convinced he can use them to advantage and without risk to those on board."

The circular strongly discourages the use of firearms.

The circular also outlines action to be taken if the attackers succeed in boarding the ship, action after an attack and how to report incidents.

The Future

The number of acts of piracy and armed robbery against ships reported to IMO in 1998 was 210, a decrease of 42 (17%) over the figure for 1997. Compared to 1997, the number of incidents reported to have occurred decreased from 8 to 6 in the Malacca Strait, from 101 to 94 in the South China Sea, from 45 to 38 in South America and the Caribbean, from 41 to 25 in the Indian Ocean, from 11 to 2 in the Mediterranean and Black Seas and from 30 to 22 in West Africa but increased from 11 to 19 in East Africa. However, the figure for 1999 is 235, an increase of 25 (11.9%) over the figure for 1998.

On 16 November 1999, the **Alondra Rainbow** incident - described at the beginning of this paper - was brought to a dramatic close off Goa, when the Indian Coast Guard succeeded in boarding the ship. They prevented attempts to scuttle her and so destroy evidence of the crime and 15 suspects were arrested.

However, as the Baltic and International Maritime Conference (BIMCO) has pointed out, according to information circulated by the United States Office of Naval Intelligence, the attack was not executed solely on the basis of personal gain, but rather political ambitions may have driven the forces that organized and carried out the crime. It appears that 3,000 tonnes of the cargo of aluminium had been bartered in either Cambodia or Thailand for weapons destined for use by insurgents who have been waging a long-standing action against the Sri Lankan armed forces.

There are, however, several encouraging aspects to this case. The actions taken by the Indian Coast Guard and Navy were particularly noteworthy, as were the efforts of the ICC/International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Centre (see below) which circulated information describing the hijacked vessel and co-ordinated the reports from ships in the area that spotted her.

BIMCO commented: "The actions of the Indian Coast Guard, Navy and Police serve well as an example to other nations as to how piracy incidents can be dealt with in conformity with presently available international law."

Nevertheless, the incident showed that the criminals involved are becoming increasingly sophisticated - and ruthless. There is evidence that some attacks have been arranged with the connivance of organized criminal gangs, with ships being targetted because of the cargoes they carry rather than attacked at random, as seems to have been the case some years ago. Despite figures showing that the number of attacks has decreased, piracy is still a major problem, on an international scale.

The IMB Piracy Reporting Centre

Outrage in the shipping industry at the alarming growth in piracy on the world's oceans prompted the creation of the International Maritime Bureau's Piracy Reporting Centre in October 1992. Located at IMB's Far East Regional Office in Kuala Lumpur, the centre is financed by voluntary contributions from shipping and insurance companies, and its services are free of charge to all vessels irrespective of ownership or flag.

The centre supplies investigating teams that respond immediately to acts of piracy and collect evidence for law enforcement agencies. This service is funded by the International Transport Workers' Federation. Specific Piracy Reporting Centre tasks are to:

- report piracy incidents and armed robbery at sea to law enforcement agencies
- locate vessels that have been seized by pirates and recover stolen cargoes
- help to bring pirates to justice
- assist owners and crews of ships that have been attacked
- collate information on piracy in all parts of the world.

The IMB Piracy Centre maintains a round-the-clock watch every day of the year. In close collaboration with law enforcement, the centre acts on reports of suspicious shipping movements, piracy and armed robbery at sea anywhere in the world. The centre broadcasts daily status bulletins via satellite recording pirate attacks on shipping in

the East and South East Asian region. Quarterly reports are made available to interested bodies, including IMO.

The IMB Piracy Reporting Centre is located at:

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Attacks are still often relatively small in scale - but they occur far more frequently than is generally believed. The attached extract from the IMB's web site:

http://www.iccwbo.org/ccs/menu_imb_piracy.asp

lists incidents around the world in November 1999.

"On 13.11.99 at Chennai (India): Pirates in motor boats attempted to board vessel but alert crew repelled the attack.

On 13.11.99 in Posn: 05:24.1n-100:21.2e (Penang Port): Pirates armed with knives boarded vessel and opened containers but were spotted by crew members who raised alarm. Pirates fled by jumping overside.

On 13.11.99 at Surabaya Port: while berthed, pirates boarded vessel and stole ship's equipment.

On 19.11.99 in Posn 15:32n-041:53e near Jazirat at Ta'ir (Red Sea): a sailing yacht reported by Satphone that they were being boarded by pirates. There were seven pirates with machine guns. Second call said they had fought off pirates.

On 20.11.99 at Yangon Port (Myanmar): Three or four pirates armed with long knives boarded vsl by climbing stbd mooring cable. Duty AB surprised them by raising alarm. The pirates dived into river and vanished in a wooden fishing boat.

On 21.11.99 at Karang Canning Shoal, Batu Gelasa Island : Pirates tried to board a vessel. The alert crew managed to repel the attack.

On 23.11.99 at Tanjung Priok, (Indonesia): Ten pirates armed with long knives boarded vessel. Duty watchmen raised alarm and pirates escaped.

On 26.11.99 at 02593s 10658e (Leplia Str): Five pirates armed with long knives boarded vessel and tried to hold chief officer hostage. The crew intervened and rescued the chief officer. Pirates jumped into water and escaped.

On 26.11.99 at Posn 0301s 10658e (Gelasa Str, Indonesia): Seven pirates armed with long knives boarded a vessel. Took master, 3rd officer, 4th

officer and AB hostage and stole cash, crew's belongings and ship's equipment.

On 27.11.99 in Posn 02:58s 106:58e (Leplia Str, Indonesia): Six pirates in a fast speed boat attempted to board a vessel. Master and crew raised general alarm and decklights and other anti-piracy measures were employed . The attack was repelled."

None of these incidents resulted in death or serious injury. But the fact that there were so many of them in such a short period of time shows that the problem of piracy and armed robbery is now relatively commonplace in certain areas of the world. Private yachts and pleasure craft have been subject to attack as well as merchant ships. And the danger of large-scale criminals becoming involved is very real: if this does occur then the seriousness of the attacks will rise - and so will the number of deaths and injuries that result.

Some Governments and shipowners have suggested that an international naval force be established under the auspices of the United Nations to patrol danger areas. Others have urged coastal States to take more action. The adoption of the IMO code on the investigation of piracy will help Governments take action against suspected pirates and several people have urged Governments to ratify the 1988 Rome Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation.

This Convention was adopted under the auspices of IMO to provide a legal framework for taking action against those suspected of criminal actions at sea. One problem that has emerged in recent years is that uncertainties about the law have meant that persons suspected of piracy have often been released without charge.

What is certain is that piracy is now a global problem. It can only be tackled effectively if there is co-operation at the international level, by local coastal States, trading countries, shipping companies and law enforcement agencies. And the action taken needs to be vigorous, effective and quick - before piracy grows from being a local problem to an international menace.

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