

Shipping industry launches Gulf of Guinea Declaration on Suppression of Piracy

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Roughly 100 maritime companies have signed the Gulf of Guinea Declaration on Suppression of Piracy, which was launched on Monday.

A group of shipowners convened by BIMCO drafted the declaration.

BIMCO noted in a release that, during 2020, 135 crew were kidnapped from their ships globally, with the Gulf of Guinea accounting for more than 95% of the crew numbers kidnapped. This had happened in international waters in an area less than 20% of the size of the sea area dominated by Somali pirates a few years ago.

The pirates launch their attacks from the Niger Delta, where they also subsequently hold their hostages.

Sadan Kaptanoglu, BIMCO president and a shipowner who has personally had a ship hijacked and crew kidnapped in the Gulf of Guinea, said that “we hope that all parties with an interest in a safe Gulf of Guinea will sign this Declaration”.

BIMCO said that it welcomed the positive steps taken by regional states, especially Nigeria. “However, in reality, it will take some years before these states can effectively manage the problem. In the interim period the best solution is to have capable military assets from able and willing non-regional states to actively combat piracy in the area in support of the efforts by countries in the region. The signatories firmly believe that piracy and attempts at kidnapping are preventable through active anti-piracy operations and that by the end of 2023 the number of attacks by pirates can be reduced by at least 80%”, BIMCO said.

It noted that the Maritime Safety Committee of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) during its session from 5th to 14th May 2021 discussed Gulf of Guinea piracy. “Although development of related IMO resolutions on this topic is constructive and welcome, much more remains to be done, particularly in the short term”, said BIMCO.

BIMCO has maintained that the piracy could be suppressed with as few as two frigates with helicopters and one maritime patrol aircraft.

It said that “it is therefore imperative that non-regional countries provide the necessary assets on a rotation basis, and that one or more states in the area support the effort with logistics and prosecution of arrested pirates. The Declaration does not aspire to provide the long-term solution to the piracy problem but to help make seafarers safe today.”

BIMCO accepted that “the root causes of the piracy problem in the Gulf of Guinea can only be solved by Nigeria”.

With some 30m people living in the Niger Delta, many under difficult conditions, “it would be naïve to think that anyone other than Nigeria can address the roots of the piracy problem”.