

LIABILITY OF THE SHIPOWNER IN CASE OF  
SICKNESS, INJURY, OR DEATH OF SEAMEN  
(ILO CONVENTION NO. 55)<sup>1</sup>

*Convention adopted by the General Conference of the International  
Labor Organization at Geneva October 24, 1936*

*Senate advice and consent to ratification. with understandings, June 13,  
1938*<sup>2</sup>

*Ratified by the President of the United States, with understandings,  
August 15, 1938*<sup>2</sup>

*Ratification of the United States registered with the Secretary-General  
of the League of Nations October 29, 1938*

*Entered into force October 29, 1939*<sup>3</sup>

*Proclaimed by the President of the United States September 29, 1939*

54 Stat. 1693; Treaty Series 951

The General Conference of the International Labour Organisation,  
Having been convened at Geneva by the Governing Body of the Inter-  
national Labour Office, and having met in its Twenty-first Session on 6  
October 1936, and

Having decided upon the adoption of certain proposals with regard to the  
liability of the shipowner in case of sickness, injury or death of seamen, which  
is included in the second item on the Agenda of the Session, and

Having determined that these proposals shall take the form of a Draft  
International Convention, adopts, this twenty-fourth day of October of the  
year one thousand nine hundred and thirty-six, the following Draft Con-

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<sup>1</sup> Also cited as "Shipowners' Liability (Sick and Injured Seamen) Convention, 1936."

<sup>2</sup> The U.S. understandings read as follows:

"That the United States Government understands and construes the words 'vessels registered in a territory' appearing in this convention to include all vessels of the United States as defined under the laws of the United States.

"That the United States Government understands and construes the words 'maritime navigation' appearing in this Convention to mean navigation on the high seas only.

"That the provisions of this convention shall apply to all territory over which the United States exercises jurisdiction except the Government of the Commonwealth of the Philippine Islands and the Panama Canal Zone, with respect to which this Government reserves its decision."

<sup>3</sup> Twelve months after date of registration of second instrument of ratification.

vention which may be cited as the Shipowners' Liability (Sick and Injured Seamen) Convention, 1936:

#### ARTICLE 1

1. This Convention applies to all persons employed on board any vessel, other than a ship of war, registered in a territory for which this Convention is in force and ordinarily engaged in maritime navigation.

2. Provided that any Member of the International Labour Organisation may in its national laws or regulations make such exceptions as it deems necessary in respect of:

(a) persons employed on board,

(i) vessels of public authorities when such vessels are not engaged in trade;

(ii) coastwise fishing boats;

(iii) boats of less than twenty-five tons gross tonnage;

(iv) wooden ships of primitive build such as dhows and junks;

(b) persons employed on board by an employer other than the shipowner;

(c) persons employed solely in ports in repairing, cleaning, loading or unloading vessels;

(d) members of the shipowner's family;

(e) pilots.

#### ARTICLE 2

1. The shipowner shall be liable in respect of:

(a) sickness and injury occurring between the date specified in the articles of agreement for reporting for duty and the termination of the engagement;

(b) death resulting from such sickness or injury.

2. Provided that national laws or regulations may make exceptions in respect of:

(a) injury incurred otherwise than in the service of the ship;

(b) injury or sickness due to the wilful act, default or misbehaviour of the sick, injured or deceased person;

(c) sickness or infirmity intentionally concealed when the engagement is entered into.

3. National laws or regulations may provide that the shipowner shall not be liable in respect of sickness, or death directly attributable to sickness, if at the time of the engagement the person employed refused to be medically examined.

#### ARTICLE 3

For the purpose of this Convention, medical care and maintenance at the expense of the shipowner comprises:

- (a) medical treatment and the supply of proper and sufficient medicines and therapeutical appliances; and
- (b) board and lodging.

## ARTICLE 4

1. The shipowner shall be liable to defray the expense of medical care and maintenance until the sick or injured person has been cured, or until the sickness or incapacity has been declared of a permanent character.

2. Provided that national laws or regulations may limit the liability of the shipowner to defray the expense of medical care and maintenance to a period which shall not be less than sixteen weeks from the day of the injury or the commencement of the sickness.

3. Provided also that, if there is in force in the territory in which the vessel is registered a scheme applying to seamen of compulsory sickness insurance, compulsory accident insurance or workmen's compensation for accidents, national laws or regulations may provide—

(a) that a shipowner shall cease to be liable in respect of a sick or injured person from the time at which that person becomes entitled to medical benefits under the insurance or compensation scheme;

(b) that the shipowner shall cease to be liable from the time prescribed by law for the grant of medical benefits under the insurance or compensation scheme to the beneficiaries of such schemes, even when the sick or injured person is not covered by the scheme in question, unless he is excluded from the scheme by reason of any restriction which affects particularly foreign workers or workers not resident in the territory in which the vessel is registered.

## ARTICLE 5

1. Where the sickness or injury results in incapacity for work the shipowner shall be liable—

(a) to pay full wages as long as the sick or injured person remains on board;

(b) if the sick or injured person has dependants, to pay wages in whole or in part as prescribed by national laws or regulations from the time when he is landed until he has been cured or the sickness or incapacity has been declared of a permanent character.

2. Provided that national laws or regulations may limit the liability of the shipowner to pay wages in whole or in part in respect of a person no longer on board to a period which shall not be less than sixteen weeks from the day of the injury or the commencement of the sickness.

3. Provided also that, if there is in force in the territory in which the vessel is registered a scheme applying to seamen of compulsory sickness insurance, compulsory accident insurance or workmen's compensation for accidents, national laws or regulations may provide:

(a) that a shipowner shall cease to be liable in respect of a sick or injured person from the time at which that person becomes entitled to cash benefits under the insurance or compensation scheme;

(b) that the shipowner shall cease to be liable from the time prescribed by law for the grant of cash benefits under the insurance or compensation scheme to the beneficiaries of such schemes, even when the sick or injured person is not covered by the scheme in question, unless he is excluded from the scheme by reason of any restriction which affects particularly foreign workers or workers not resident in the territory in which the vessel is registered.

#### ARTICLE 6

1. The shipowner shall be liable to defray the expense of repatriating every sick or injured person who is landed during the voyage in consequence of sickness or injury.

2. The port to which the sick or injured person is to be returned shall be—

(a) the port at which he was engaged; or

(b) the port at which the voyage commenced; or

(c) a port in his own country or the country to which he belongs; or

(d) another port agreed upon by him and the master or shipowner, with the approval of the competent authority.

3. The expense of repatriation shall include all charges for the transportation, accommodation and food of the sick or injured person during the journey and his maintenance up to the time fixed for this departure.

4. If the sick or injured person is capable of work, the shipowner may discharge his liability to repatriate him by providing him with suitable employment on board a vessel proceeding to one of the destinations mentioned in paragraph 2 of this Article.

#### ARTICLE 7

1. The shipowner shall be liable to defray burial expenses in case of death occurring on board, or in case of death occurring on shore if at the time of his death the deceased person was entitled to medical care and maintenance at the shipowner's expense.

2. National laws or regulations may provide that burial expenses paid by the shipowner shall be reimbursed by an insurance institution in cases in which funeral benefit is payable in respect of the deceased person under laws or regulations relating to social insurance or workmen's compensation.

#### ARTICLE 8

National laws or regulations shall require the shipowner or his representative to take measures for safeguarding property left on board by sick, injured or deceased persons to whom this Convention applies.

## ARTICLE 9

National laws or regulations shall make provision for securing the rapid and inexpensive settlement of disputes concerning the liability of the ship-owner under this Convention.

## ARTICLE 10

The shipowner may be exempted from liability under Articles 4, 6 and 7 of this Convention in so far as such liability is assumed by the public authorities.

## ARTICLE 11

This Convention and national laws or regulations relating to benefits under this Convention shall be so interpreted and enforced as to ensure equality of treatment to all seamen irrespective of nationality, domicile or race.

## ARTICLE 12

Nothing in this Convention shall affect any law, award, custom or agreement between ship-owners and seamen which ensures more favourable conditions than those provided by this Convention.

## ARTICLE 13

1. In respect of the territories referred to in Article 35 of the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation,<sup>4</sup> each Member of the Organisation which ratifies this Convention shall append to its ratification a declaration stating:

(a) the territories in respect of which it undertakes to apply the provisions of the Convention without modification;

(b) the territories in respect of which it undertakes to apply the provisions of the Convention subject to modifications, together with details of the said modifications;

(c) the territories in respect of which the Convention is inapplicable and in such cases the grounds on which it is inapplicable;

(d) the territories in respect of which it reserves its decision.

2. The undertakings referred to in sub-paragraphs (a) and (b) of paragraph 1 of this Article shall be deemed to be an integral part of the ratification and shall have the force of ratification.

3. Any Member may by a subsequent declaration cancel in whole or in part any reservations made in its original declaration in virtue of sub-paragraphs (b), (c) or (d) of paragraph 1 of this Article.

<sup>4</sup> TS 874, *ante*, vol. 2, p. 251 (art. 421).

## ARTICLE 14

The formal ratifications of this Convention shall be communicated to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations for registration.

## ARTICLE 15

1. This Convention shall be binding only upon those Members of the International Labour Organisation whose ratifications have been registered with the Secretary-General.

2. It shall come into force twelve months after the date on which the ratifications of two Members have been registered with the Secretary-General.

3. Thereafter, this Convention shall come into force for any Member twelve months after the date on which its ratification has been registered.

## ARTICLE 16

As soon as the ratifications of two Members of the International Labour Organisation have been registered, the Secretary-General of the League of Nations shall so notify all the Members of the International Labour Organisation. He shall likewise notify them of the registration of ratifications which may be communicated subsequently by other members of the Organisation.

## ARTICLE 17

1. A Member which has ratified this Convention may denounce it after the expiration of ten years from the date on which the Convention first comes into force, by an act communicated to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations for registration. Such denunciation shall not take effect until one year after the date on which it is registered.

2. Each Member which has ratified this Convention and which does not, within the year following the expiration of the period of ten years mentioned in the preceding paragraph, exercise the right of denunciation provided for in this Article, will be bound for another period of ten years and, thereafter, may denounce this Convention at the expiration of each period of ten years under the terms provided for in this Article.

## ARTICLE 18

At the expiration of each period of ten years after the coming into force of this Convention, the Governing Body of the International Labour Office shall present to the General Conference a report on the working of this Convention and shall consider the desirability of placing on the Agenda of the Conference the question of its revision in whole or in part.

## ARTICLE 19

1. Should the Conference adopt a new Convention revising this Convention in whole or in part, then, unless the new Convention otherwise provides,

(a) the ratification by a Member of the new revising Convention shall *ipso jure* involve the immediate denunciation of this Convention, notwithstanding the provisions of Article 17 above, if and when the new revising Convention shall have come into force;

(b) as from the date when the new revising Convention comes into force this Convention shall cease to be open to ratification by the Members.

2. This Convention shall in any case remain in force in its actual form and content for those Members which have ratified it but have not ratified the revising Convention.

#### ARTICLE 20

The French and English texts of this Convention shall both be authentic.