

Circular From GARD

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Piracy in West Africa - a persistent and serious threat

Intercargo issues recommendations following two recent tanker hijackings and a spate of kidnappings of seafarers in the Gulf of Guinea.

While the International Chamber of Commerce's (ICC) International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reports a [drop in global piracy in 2017](#), there is no time for complacency. Piracy in hot spots such as the Gulf of Guinea and South-East Asia persist and 2017 also saw some resurgence in attacks off Somalia. In addition, the ongoing conflict in Yemen continues to impact the safety of vessels transiting the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden.

The effect of piracy on crew and their safety continues to be a cause for concern and transiting West African waters remains particularly challenging. According to the IMB, ten incidents of kidnappings involving 65 crew members took place in and around Nigerian waters in 2017. While the IMB reported no vessel hijackings in the Gulf of Guinea during 2017, two tankers have been reported hijacked off Cotonou anchorage, Benin by mid-February 2018. In the most recent incident in the region, three crew members were reportedly kidnapped from a fishing vessel operating off Cameroon. Of the 16 vessels reportedly fired upon globally in 2017, seven occurred in Nigeria – further evidencing the levels of violence and threats to seafarers in these waters. See the [IMB Live Piracy & Robbery Map](#) for details.

Recommendations

Intercargo, the International Association of Dry Cargo Shipowners, issued a [joint industry alert](#) on 14 February 2018 in response to the increasing threat of hijack and kidnap in the Gulf of Guinea. It urges vessels operating in the area to report to the FR/UK operated Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade - Gulf of Guinea (MDAT-GoG) which is a secure and trusted agency. In addition, Intercargo recommend Masters of vessels operating in the area to plan according to the following:

- *Arrive at the Pilot Station, Port, Anchorage or STS Area "Just in Time." Time transit with consideration to safe speed and maintaining distance offshore or use an offshore waiting area. Consider higher transit speeds where risk/threat assessment is high.*
- *Rendezvous – Where possible, avoid waiting and slow steaming. Consider offering several alternative rendezvous points and advise rendezvous points at the last minute. If waiting, keep well off the coast (up to 200nm). Do not give away waiting positions. Do not drift and keep engines ready for immediate maneuvers.*
- *Vessels should proceed within the 200'nm range at Full Speed.*
- *Anchoring – Where practicable, a prolonged stay at anchorage is to be avoided.*
- *Minimize use of VHF and use e-mail or secure satellite telephone instead. Where possible only answer known or legitimate callers on the VHF, bearing in mind that imposters are likely and may*

even appear in uniform.

- *The greatest risks of piracy are at night and these need to be factored into all planning. Where possible, operations should start and end during daylight hours.*
- *The use of Privately Contracted Armed Guards on board is banned in Nigerian waters.*
- *If using an armed escort, due diligence on the company providing this service must be conducted to ensure strict adherence to the MOU issued by the Nigerian Navy and NIMASA.*
- *Ship owners and managers must have a means of verification that hardening measures are available and in place on vessels prior to entering the Gulf of Guinea area.*
- *Spot checks for verification at ports within the Gulf of Guinea area is an additional option to consider.*
- *Nigerian Naval armed guards can protect merchant ships utilising patrol boats to escort ships in the region.*
- *Maintain all-round visual lookouts and good radar watch.*
- *Report to MDAT-GoG:*
 - watchkeepers@mdat-gog.org
 - *Emergency Tel: +33(0) 298 22 88 88*

Members and clients with vessels operating in the Gulf of Guinea are also advised to closely monitor the situation via the [IMB website](#) and by staying in close contact with regional authorities and their local agents. A risk assessment should be conducted and the relevant preventive measures adopted, following the [Interim Guidelines for Owners, Operators and Masters for protection against piracy in the Gulf of Guinea region](#) and the [BMP4](#).

The US Maritime Administration (MARAD) has recently issued guidance to vessels transiting or operating in the Gulf of Guinea, see its [Advisory 2018-004](#) of 24 January 2018.

Further information, including our updated [Piracy - Questions and Answers](#), is also available from the Gard website: [Piracy - Robbery or Illegal Violence at Sea](#).

Source of Information: Gard P&I Club