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Circular Letter No.5072
1 October 2025

To: IMO Member States
United Nations and specialized agencies
Intergovernmental organizations
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status

Subject: **2026 IMO Honours for Exceptional Bravery at Sea**

The Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization has the honour to invite nominations for the 2026 IMO Honours for Exceptional Bravery at Sea. As per the revised guidelines approved by the Council at its 127th session, the level of honour will be determined by the Panel of Judges on the recommendation of the Assessment Panel.

The *Guidelines for the IMO Honours for Exceptional Bravery at Sea* and the nomination form are contained in annexes 1 and 2 to this Circular Letter, respectively. The list of previous recipients of the Award is included in annex 3.

Member Governments, intergovernmental organizations with observer status and non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO are invited to refer to the Guidelines when considering submitting a nomination, bearing in mind the importance of providing an adequate description of the actual act of bravery for the purpose of the assessment, and that the Honours are intended to recognize actions in response to one specific incident, rather than multiple incidents.

Nominations of candidates to be considered for the 2026 Honours, for actions performed during the period **1 March 2025 to 28 February 2026**, should be submitted by completing and signing the nomination form contained in annex 2. The deadline for submission of nominations is **31 March 2026**.

All nominations should be submitted to ero@imo.org and addressed to:

The Secretary-General
International Maritime Organization
4 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7SR
United Kingdom

The presentation of the Honours will take place at a special ceremony, which will be announced in due course.

ANNEX 1

GUIDELINES FOR THE IMO HONOURS FOR EXCEPTIONAL BRAVERY AT SEA

Introduction

1 These Guidelines* aim to define the purpose of, and the criteria for granting, the IMO Honours for Exceptional Bravery at Sea. They stipulate the process by which nominations will be sought, considered, assessed, judged and decided; the form of the three categories of honour; and the manner in which they will be awarded.

Purpose and criteria

2 The Honours will be conferred on individuals or groups of individuals who, at the risk to their own life, perform acts of exceptional bravery in attempting to save life at sea or in attempting to prevent or mitigate damage to the marine environment. Such acts of bravery may also involve extraordinary seamanship skills in very difficult conditions or any other display of outstanding courage.

3 Except in the most extraordinary circumstances, the nominated rescues should occur at sea or those rescued should emanate from a vessel. The Honours may also be granted posthumously.

4 There are three categories of honour:

- .1 The Award: for the nominee(s) judged to have performed the most outstanding act of bravery in a situation of grave danger to themselves or others and under very difficult conditions.
- .2 Certificates of Commendation: for nominees who have committed acts of extraordinary bravery in a situation of danger to themselves or others and under challenging conditions.
- .3 Letters of Commendation: for nominees who are judged to deserve some form of special recognition for their meritorious acts of bravery.

5 The level of honour is generally determined by the circumstances surrounding the incident, the degree of risk to the life of the person(s) performing the act, or to the person(s) being rescued, or the threat to the marine environment and whether such actions were taken with disregard for the nominee's own safety. In addition, personal skills or qualifications of the candidate must be taken into account, differentiating between the extraordinary actions of professional rescuers and those of others who, in the normal course of their duties, would not be expected to risk their lives to rescue persons in distress at sea.

* *Guidelines for the establishment of the IMO Award for Exceptional Bravery at Sea* were approved by the Council at its ninety-sixth session in June 2006 and endorsed by the Assembly at its twenty-fifth session in November 2007. The Council approved revisions to the Guidelines at its 113th session in December 2014, which were endorsed by the Assembly at its twenty-ninth session in December 2015, as well as at its 120th session in July 2018 and noted by the Assembly at its thirty-first session in December 2019. Further amendments to the Guidelines were approved by the Council at its 127th session in July 2022 and endorsed by the Assembly at its thirty-third session in December 2023, and the name of the scheme became the "IMO Honours for Exceptional Bravery at Sea" to reflect the establishment of the new categories of honour.

6 All nominations will be initially considered for the Award. The level of honour will be assessed by the Assessment Panel and decided by the Panel of Judges.

Nominations

7 Nominations for the Award should be made by IMO Member States, intergovernmental organizations with observer status and non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO. The Honours are intended to recognize actions in response to a specific incident, rather than multiple incidents that may have occurred during the qualifying period.

8 Nominations should be addressed to the Secretary-General in accordance with procedures outlined in the yearly circular inviting nominations, which includes the relevant forms that need to be completed and signed. Nominations should indicate the nominating Government (and need not be confined to its own nationals) or organization. They should also provide a full description of the circumstances and events giving rise to the nomination, including:

- .1 location of the incident;
- .2 prevailing weather conditions;
- .3 further details of the incident;
- .4 details of the individual/group nominated;
- .5 personal skills/qualifications of the nominee(s);
- .6 potential damage to the marine environment (if any);
- .7 narrative description of the exceptional act of bravery, including such factors as:
 - skill displayed;
 - leadership demonstrated;
 - determination to conduct the rescue operation;
 - exceptional courage demonstrated;
 - degree of risk (to human lives and/or the marine environment) involved;
 - exceptional seamanship involved; as well as
- .8 any other information, including audiovisual materials, supporting the nomination.

9 In order to ensure a proper and fair assessment by the judging panels, it is essential that Governments and organizations, when nominating candidates, provide clear and sufficient information in the narrative description (point .7 above), particularly the reasons why the nominated action warrants the description of "exceptional bravery at sea".

Qualifying period and the deadline for submission of nominations

10 The qualifying period for any given year should be for actions performed from 1 March of the previous year to 28 February of the current year. The deadline for the submission of nominations should be on 31 March of the current year. In the case that 31 March falls on a weekend or public holiday (UK), the following first working day will be considered as the deadline.

11 If the qualifying period and/or the deadline for submission of nominations need to vary or be extended due to extraordinary circumstances, the Secretariat will inform Governments and organizations in a timely and appropriate manner.

12 Actions performed outside the qualifying period or nominations received after the deadline has expired will not be eligible for consideration.

Assessment Panel

13 Nominations for the Award will be scrutinized by an Assessment Panel composed of the Secretary-General or his nominee, as Chair, together with experts nominated by the following NGOs in consultative status with IMO:

- the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS);
- the International Maritime Pilots' Association (IMPA);
- the International Federation of Shipmasters' Associations (IFSMA);
- the International Salvage Union (ISU);
- the International Maritime Rescue Federation (IMRF); and
- the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).

14 The members of the Panel will be appointed by the Secretary-General and will serve for one year in their personal and expert capacity and not as representatives of the organizations nominating them. Members of the Panel from organizations submitting nominations should recuse themselves from consideration of those nominations.

15 The function of the Assessment Panel will be to review the nominations, taking into account the purpose of and criteria for the Honours, vis-à-vis the description of the factual circumstances giving rise to the nominations and the related supporting documentation. The Panel will submit a report to a Panel of Judges with the candidates they consider deserving of each category of honour, along with the rationale for their recommendations.

Panel of Judges

16 A Panel of Judges composed of the Chairs of the Maritime Safety Committee, the Marine Environment Protection Committee, the Legal Committee, the Technical Cooperation Committee and the Facilitation Committee and chaired by the Chair of the Council will consider the recommendations of the Assessment Panel and select the recipients of each category of honour. Members of the Panel from countries submitting nominations should recuse themselves from consideration of those nominations.

17 If the Chair of the Panel (i.e. the Chair of the Council) is not available, the Vice-Chair of the Council will serve as Chair. If a Chair of any committee is not available to serve as a member of the Panel, the corresponding Vice-Chair may serve in his/her place.

18 In the event that the Panel of Judges decides that no act performed by any candidate merits the Award, they may still decide to recognize deserving nominees with Certificates of Commendation or Letters of Commendation.

19 The Council will be invited to endorse the recommendation of the Panel of Judges.
Form of the three categories of honour and the ceremony of presentation

20 The IMO Honours for Exceptional Bravery at Sea will be presented by the Secretary-General at IMO Headquarters on a major IMO occasion, as appropriate, taking into account, inter alia, the availability of the recipient of the Award. A virtual mode may be considered, if needed. In exceptional circumstances, the Honours may be presented at an alternative location.

21 The Award will take the form of a medal which will be accompanied by a certificate citing the type of act of exceptional bravery performed.

22 The recipients of the Award and Certificates of Commendation will be invited to attend the IMO Awards Ceremony to receive their accolades in person. All costs related to participants' attendance will be covered by the nominating Government/organization.

23 Recipients of Letters of Commendation may also attend the ceremony, if they wish. However, Letters of Commendation will be posted to the nominating authorities, which will be responsible for forwarding/presenting the accolade to the recipients.

ANNEX 2

**NOMINATION OF CANDIDATE FOR
THE 2026 IMO HONOURS FOR EXCEPTIONAL BRAVERY AT SEA**

The Government of
(Name of country)

or

The
(Name of organization*)

hereby nominates (name, title and nationality of candidate (if an individual is nominated) to be inserted)

.....
.....
.....
.....

for the **2026 IMO Honours for Exceptional Bravery at Sea.**

For, and on behalf of, **the Government of**

or **(name of organization)**

Signed: Date:

Name:

Designation:

Official seal (where appropriate):

* Intergovernmental organizations with observer status and non-governmental organizations in consultative status with IMO.

DESCRIPTION OF CIRCUMSTANCES AND EVENTS

In accordance with the *Guidelines for the IMO Honours for Exceptional Bravery at Sea*, the candidature of [nominee] is supported by the following description of the circumstances and events giving rise to the nomination. It is noted that not all of the information requested below may be available; nonetheless, as much information as possible should be provided.

1 Location of the incident (latitude/longitude or distance/bearing from known geographic point of reference):

.....

2 On-scene weather (wind/sea state/precipitation/temperature):

.....

3 Details of the incident (**note that the intent of the Honours is to recognize actions in response to a specific incident, rather than multiple incidents that may have occurred during the qualifying period, i.e. from 1 March 2025 to 28 February 2026**):

.1 Nature of distress (sinking, fire, collision, etc.):

.....

.2 Date/time of the incident:

.....

.3 Name/description of the vessel (or person) in distress:

.....

.4 Total number of lives at risk:

.....

.5 Number of lives saved:

.....

.6 Name of Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) (or other shore-based organization involved that may have relevant records of the incident):

.....

- 4 Details of the individual/group nominated:
- .1 Ship/unit to which the nominee was attached at the time of rescue:
.....
- .2 Parent company/organization:
.....
- .3 Nominee's name, nationality and position/assignment on board:
.....
- .4 Nominee's role in rescue operation:
.....
- 5 Please indicate whether the nominee is a full-time SAR professional, or is involved in SAR operations on a part-time/voluntary basis, or has no training beyond the fundamental level required of their regular non-SAR related position:
.....
- 6 If the incident involved attempting to mitigate damage to the marine environment, describe the consequences to the environment if the nominee's action was not taken:
.....
- 7 **Provide a narrative description of not more than three pages of the exceptional act of bravery including such factors as: skill displayed; leadership demonstrated; determination to conduct the rescue operation; exceptional courage demonstrated; degree of risk (to human lives and/or the marine environment) involved; and/or exceptional seamanship involved.**
- 8 **Provide any other information, including audiovisual materials, supporting the nomination.**

ANNEX 3

RECIPIENTS OF THE IMO AWARD FOR EXCEPTIONAL BRAVERY AT SEA

Year	Country/Organization	Recipient
2025	International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)	Mr. Lee Tae-young, officer onboard the fishing vessel 135 Geumseongho
2024	Marshall Islands	Captain Avhilash Rawat and the crew of the oil tanker Marlin Luanda
	Mexico	Captain Jorge Fernando Galaviz Fuentes and the crew of the tugboat Pemex Maya
2023	United States of America	Aviation Survival Technician Second Class Calleb Halle, United States Coast Guard
2022	China	Mr. Bo Xu, Chief Officer of the M/T Jian Qiao 502
2021	Viet Nam	Mr. Tran Van Khoi, Search and Rescue Officer of the Regional Maritime Search and Rescue Coordination Center No.II, Viet Nam Maritime Administration
2020	Brazil	Mr. Marcio Santos Teixeira and Mr. Fabio Rodrigues Alves de Abreu, members of the São Paulo Pilots
	Philippines	Petty Officer Second Class Ralph Ofalla Barajan of the Philippine Coast Guard
2019	United States of America	Aviation Survival Technician Second Class Michael W. Kelly, United States Coast Guard
2018	China	Mr. Zhong Haifeng, Senior Diver of the Engineering Team of Guangzhou Salvage
2017	International Maritime Pilots' Association (IMPA)	Captain Michael G. McGee and Captain Michael C. Phillips, members of the Houston Pilots
2016	India	Captain Radhika Menon, master of the M/T Sampurna Swarajya
2015	United States of America	Aviation Survival Technician Christopher Leon, United States Coast Guard
2014	Denmark	Captain Andreas Kristensen and the crew of the M/V Britannia Seaways

Year	Country/Organization	Recipient
2013	China United States of America	Mr. Jinguo Yang (posthumously), sailor on the ferry Tong Chang Qi Du 11 Aviation Survival Technician Second Class Randy J. Haba and Aviation Survival Technician Second Class Daniel J. Todd, United States Coast Guard
2012	Canada Chile	Sergeant Janick Gilbert (posthumously), Master Corporal Max Lahaye-Lemay and Master Corporal Marco Journeyman, Royal Canadian Air Force Able Seaman César Flores Flores, Chilean Navy
2011	Republic of Korea	Captain Seog Hae-gyun of the M/V SAMHO Jewelry
2010	Australia	Fourth Engineer James Fanifau of the M/V Scarlett Lucy
2009	New Zealand United States of America	Mr. Maurice Conti and Mrs. Sophie Conti of the sailing vessel Ocealys Aviation Survival Technician Second Class Abram A. Heller, United States Coast Guard
2008	Brazil	Mr. Rodolpho Fonseca da Silva Rigueira of the drill ship Noble Roger Eason
2007	Bahamas and the International Federation of Shipmasters' Association (IFSMA)	Second Officer Mustafa Topiwala of the oil/bulk ore carrier M/V Searose G and Captain Zvonimir Ostric (onboard trainer)