

World Conference on Disaster Reduction

Kobe, Japan

18-22 January 2005

Address by Mr Koji Sekimizu, Director, Maritime Safety Division

International Maritime Organization

Ministers, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Koji Sekimizu and I am Director of the Maritime Safety Division of the International Maritime Organization, which is the specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for the safety and security of international shipping and the protection of the marine environment from pollution by ships.

Since it began operations in 1959, IMO has established an extensive framework of international conventions, rules, standards and guidelines designed to enhance maritime safety, security and protection of the marine environment and thus prevent maritime accidents and reduce their effects. For example, standards governing the design, construction, operation and manning of ships and the training of seafarers are aimed at preventing accidents, while systems for distress and safety communication, search and rescue, oil and chemical spill preparedness and response are all geared to minimising the effects on people, the environment and property on those relatively infrequent occasions when major accidents do occur.

IMO's environmental agenda also includes work to reduce the impacts of global warming and ozone depletion and to provide special protection to those sea areas that are particularly sensitive in order to preserve the marine environment on which important human activities such as transport, fisheries and tourism depend.

In the context of this conference, it is true to say that, although maritime accidents cannot strictly be termed natural disasters, nevertheless the forces of nature frequently play a part in their causes, and the natural environment is, sadly, often the victim of their effects.

Turning now to IMO's specific response to the tsunami disaster: all of us at IMO joined the rest of the world in expressing our shock and sadness at those dreadful events and I should like to

