

World Ports Sustainability Program (organized by IAPH)
Antwerp, Belgium, 22-23 March 2018
Speech by Kitack Lim, Secretary-General
International Maritime Organization

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first express my appreciation to the Port of Antwerp and to IAPH for organizing this important event.

In 2015, nations united to agree and adopt an agenda for sustainable development, backed up by the most far-sighted and important set of goals that mankind has ever conceived.

In simple terms, these 17 Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, set out to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all; one short sentence but behind it lie the most ambitious and aspirational concepts imaginable.

The Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for action by all countries, worldwide, to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030. The SDGs are seen as a unique opportunity to transform the world for the better and leave no one behind.

For the Goals to be reached, everyone needs to do their part: governments, the private sector, civil society and ordinary people.

As an agency of the United Nations, IMO is, as you would expect, firmly and strongly committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the associated SDGs.

At first glance, you may wonder how many of these Goals relate, specifically, to IMO and to the shipping and port communities. Well, the fact is that almost all the elements of the 2030 Agenda will only be realized with a sustainable transport sector supporting world trade and facilitating the global economy. Shipping and ports are, therefore, central to the SDGs – and, at IMO, we can link our work to all 17 of the SDGs – take a look at our website!

So, as you can imagine, I find it really inspirational to be here today as you in the port sector launch this bold new initiative – the World Ports Sustainability Program.

Ladies and gentlemen, shipping is the only viable delivery mechanism that can support global trade and a sustainable global economy. But, in order for shipping to function, you also need ports. Ports are the gateways through which goods and commodities come into and out of our countries. Shipping and ports are partners in the global logistics chain. They are part of the same family.

Much of the Sustainable Development Agenda is founded on economic growth. In the absence of poverty, issues like hunger, equality, education and health become easier to tackle. Investments in infrastructure, including transport infrastructure, are crucial to achieving sustainable development and empowering communities.

Improving ports, developing and strengthening inter-modal links and hinterland connections can both drive and support a growing economy, through promoting trade by sea. Here in Antwerp, where the Port Authority has stated a worthy objective to create sustainable added value and reconcile economic, social and ecological interests, you will be especially aware of the benefits that maritime activity can bring. The maritime sector, which includes shipping, ports and the people that operate them, can and should play a significant role in creating conditions for increased employment, prosperity and stability.

As the only really cost-effective way to transport the vast majority of international trade, shipping will be vital to global sustainable development and growth in the future. And the next 10 or 20 years will see as much change in shipping as we have experienced in the past 100 years, partly driven by global society's changing expectations around safety, climate change, the environment and social responsibility.

Digital disruption will arrive in the shipping world very soon. For example, we can expect artificial intelligence to have an impact on ships' navigation and operation. New players, like Google, are getting involved, developing "smart ship" concepts that could revolutionise how ships are designed, built and operated.

Technology and data hold the key to a safer and more sustainable future for shipping. Thanks to new technology emerging in so many areas – such as fuel and energy use, automation and vessel management, materials and construction, shipping is entering a new era.

Autonomous vessels, for example, are already on IMO's radar. In June last year, the IMO Member States decided to initiate a scoping exercise to determine how they might be reflected in IMO instruments. So, clearly, the Member States see this as a development that needs to be addressed now.

It is absolutely right that IMO should take a proactive and leading role in these issues. IMO is the only forum where such issues can be fully discussed, and aired, and where the appropriate actions can then be taken.

But the changing face of shipping has obvious implications and challenges for ports, too. New types of ships will require new kinds of ports. There are many factors that need discussion. As well as the continued focus on safe navigation, VTS, aids to navigation etc, other practical issues such as port security, waste reception facilities, and shore power supply all need to be developed within a proper framework.

Ports would, for example, need to offer entirely new and different services to autonomous ships. Proper consideration should be given to legal aspects, including where the responsibility would lie in case of an accident involving an autonomous ship, its consequences to the cargo, and also the implications to the shore side.

Similarly, the move to low- and zero-emission ships because of the increased focus on green and sustainable shipping will also affect ports. For example, the supply of power to recharge hybrid or battery-powered ships needs to be considered.

It is important to me that there is more collaboration between shipowners, ports, maritime administrations and all the other stakeholders in the supply chain. Joined-up policies covering the entire maritime sector are critically important.

I want to ensure that there is a platform for these important discussions at IMO. In fact, this was one of the points I made in my manifesto when I was running for the position of Secretary-General. This was the reason we created the theme for 2017 of "Connecting ships, ports and people".

Economic stability and sustainable development can be driven by an integrated approach to the maritime sector, including ports, maritime security, and facilitation of maritime traffic. Efficient shipping and seamless transport is an essential element for the world's economic growth and ports are an essential part of that chain.

And this is something we are continuing to emphasize as part of this year's World Maritime Day theme: "IMO 70: Our Heritage – Better Shipping for a Better Future". Through this theme, we are reflecting and showcasing how IMO has developed and adapted while staying true to its overall mission – to promote safe, secure, environmentally sound, efficient and sustainable shipping.

In order to achieve better shipping for a better future – ports, and, specifically the ship-port interface, clearly have a part to play.

I am on record as actively encouraging greater participation by the port sector at IMO meetings – particularly the FAL Committee, where

standardised procedures and documentation are a regular part of the agenda. Stakeholders from as many legitimate interests as possible should be represented in national and observer delegations to IMO, and participate actively in its meetings, exchanging views and best practices on more efficient measures and promoting harmonization and standardization. With improved communication comes better collaboration.

Ladies and gentlemen, ports today face a time of change. In their traditional role as the interface between ships and land-based transport systems, they need to adapt to almost continual development – bigger ships, deeper channels, more stringent safety and environmental requirements, better hinterland connectivity, for example.

But, more than that, ports must engage in the process of redefining their fundamental role. Successful and sustainable ports must now see themselves as links in the complete logistics chain – with the focus on "door-to-door" rather than "port-to-port". In the future, the "soft" technologies of digitization and big data will be as important in port development as the traditional "hard" technology issues like dredging, cranes and moving containers around.

By creating the World Ports Sustainability Program today, the global port sector is committing itself to making an active contribution to the sustainable future that we all want and need. I am delighted to be associated with this important development and I wish you every success, both in this meeting and in the future.

Let's keep working together!

Thank you.

