

## LETTER ABOUT THE SITUATION IN THE UKRAINE AND ITS IMPACT ON SEAFARERS

Dear all,

For several days, we have been witnessing the terrible events taking place in Ukraine. This war also has repercussions on the situation onboard. Normally, politics is a subject that crew members or project staff stay away from, but in this extreme situation that may change. Basically, most people just want to be able to live a normal life - with a family, a house and possibly a nice car. But now everything is under great pressure.

There are many concerns. Some Ukrainian crew members onboard want to go home to be with their families and/or fight. Others prefer to stay on board or on the project. Still others like to evacuate their families from their hometowns. Some Russian crew members are totally agreeing with the invasion. Others feel ashamed. Some even want to emigrate from Russia. And many - on both sides - have relatives who are now in grave danger. All kinds of practical questions arise: financial, options for assistance, do I want to continue to work in certain areas?, etc.

Therefore, mental tensions can pop up onboard, at a project or in the office. As a company, you naturally have an eye for this - and it can be good to give space to vent and possibly channel concerns and tensions.

As maritime chaplains, we want to let you know that we are available for conversations and mental support. Contact is possible via the details below - or inquire at one of the centers for seafarers.

Colleague Toon van de Sande has listed a number of good tips for supporting employees:

- The situation is characterized by stress.
- The most important thing is that everyone can tell their story
- Telling a story has different levels. Depending on the trust between the interlocutors, a contact can go beyond general statements and become more personal.
- It is important to make clear in advance that there are no 'wrong feelings'.
- We are also not looking for "THE" truth in these kinds of conversations.
- So, no judgments, discussion, political considerations from the side of the company, but empathy for those type of judgments etc. from the other side, i.e. by those directly affected.
- For someone who finds him/herself in such a situation, it is important to be able to relax and to tell all one's stories. There should be a balance between 'ventilating' and 'resting'.
- If you want to get in touch, don't ask questions like "How are you?" but rather something more concrete: "Were you able to sleep reasonably well? How is the contact with your family? Where do you live?"
- Give people the time, the opportunity and the choice to have their own struggle and hopefully get through it. This process is likely to be accompanied by feelings such as guilt, shame, doubt, among others. These feelings have probably always been there, but can become more and more

difficult as time goes on. Even when they see that more and more men are being mobilized in Ukraine itself, and are returning from abroad to take up arms.

- The main message is: "You are normal, the situation is abnormal!" All kind of feelings and emotions are normal... The situation is unique...
- No debate or discussions about the best solutions, but first of all: close attention for what's on people hearts and minds
- Don't promise anything you can't deliver or keep
- Give people the opportunity to have regular contact with home, but also point out 'safe working' to them. One cannot work safely with too much unhealthy stress, for example if they are too distracted.
- Is there a 'person of trust' who is separate from the company's interests, but who only cares about the well-being of the workers?
- Trust must be built and everyone reacts differently to a stressful situation. Some seem to remain their usual self – you don't notice anything about them - others will endlessly talk. Give everyone the space to respond in whatever way they want.
- Sometimes people benefit more from their direct colleagues in the workplace than from an official meeting. Keeping quiet should also be honored.
- As time goes by, the differences of opinion between Russians and Ukrainians might increase and so will the tensions. The "honeymoon phase" is over and people will be more touchy or irritable.
- A work meeting should have a business character, accompanied by understanding, attention and offering support. It cannot be a therapy or support group. The basic message is that company is there for your well-being.
- Personal support will have a much more varied character.

Wishing everyone the best,  
with kindest regards,  
Stefan

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