

**OPENING REMARKS BY ReCAAP ISC
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MASAFUMI KUROKI AT THE
12TH NAUTICAL FORUM ON 15 JANUARY 2021**

Excellency Ambassadors, Participants from Governments and Maritime Community, Ladies & Gentlemen,

1. Introduction

Good morning and Happy New Year to all of you.

My name is Masafumi Kuroki, Executive Director of the ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre.

First of all, thank you very much for your participation in the 12th Nautical Forum which we have to organise virtually this year.

I hope that all of you are doing well despite this challenging time with the COVID-19 pandemics.

I think the conditions are even more difficult for crew on board ships. They are facing prolonged periods at sea due to border control measures. We commend their continued efforts to secure maritime transportation and flow of international trade.

At this Nautical Forum, ReCAAP Information Sharing Centre would like to share the situation of piracy and sea robbery in Asia in 2020, based on our Annual Report we will release this afternoon. We hope to share a clear and objective picture of the situation in Asia so as to contribute to the maritime community for safe navigation.

2. Overview of the situation

At the beginning, I would like to present you an overview of the situation in Asia in 2020.

(1) A total of 97 incidents of piracy and armed robbery against ships were reported in 2020. They comprise 95 actual incidents and two attempted incidents. This is a 17% increase of the total incidents and a 32% increase of the actual incidents, compared to 2019.

(2) We are concerned with the significant increase of actual incidents last year. In 2018, we had 62 actual incidents which was the lowest number since the start of ReCAAP in 2006. In 2019, the actual incidents increased to 72, and last year they went up to 95.

(3) Moreover, the incidents have increased not only in a particular location but in several locations such as Bangladesh, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, South China Sea and Singapore Strait.

(4) The biggest number of incidents occurred in the Singapore Strait with 34 incidents. As you know, the Singapore Strait is composed of territorial waters of three littoral States, namely Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.

(5) Abduction of crew for ransom by the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Sulu-Celebes Seas was limited to one incident which occurred in January 2020. However, there is several information of planned kidnapping for ransom by the Group. Therefore, the risk of abduction of crew remains still high in the area.

(6) There can be multiple causes for the rise of incidents last year. It is possible that the negative impact of COVID-19 is one of the causes. The economic hardships caused by the COVID-19 to coastal communities could lead to more people resorting to sea robberies. It is also possible that prolonged work of crew on board ships, due to the difficulty of crew change, causes fatigue to the crew and may reduce their vigilance.

(7) I have to add that, despite the rise of incidents, the severity level such as violence to the crew has remained mostly at a low

level. There was only one incident of the most serious case of CAT 1. And 74% of incidents were CAT 4 incidents which are mostly petty thefts where perpetrators were not armed and crew was not harmed. There was one incident of abduction of 5 crew, 3 incidents where crew was assaulted, 1 incident where crew was temporarily taken hostage and 1 incident where crew was threatened.

(8) According to the Annual Report of International Maritime Bureau, IMB, the Gulf of Guinea reported kidnapping of 130 crew in 22 incidents in 2020. Compared to the situation in West Africa, the severity of incidents in Asia is at a much lower level.

(9) However, if opportunistic robbers see that they can commit crimes with impunity, the theft of ship stores today can easily escalate to more serious incidents including confrontation with crew. It is clear that the arrests and prosecution of perpetrators will serve as an effective deterrence.

(10) I call on the enhanced cooperation of all stakeholders concerned in order to reverse the upward trend of incidents we are seeing in recent years. Ships are requested to enhance vigilance and make timely reporting. I also call on law enforcement agencies to further strengthen surveillance and arrest the perpetrators.

3. Programme of the Forum

(1) Now let me explain the programme of today's forum.

We have prepared four presentations.

- The first presentation is by our Centre on the highlights of the situation in Asia in 2020.

- The second presentation is by Singapore Police Coast Guard on the enforcement efforts and advice to shipping industry in the Singapore Strait where we had the biggest number of incidents.

- It will be followed by a third presentation by the Philippine Coast Guard on the situation in the Philippines, including the risk of abduction of crew in Sulu-Celebes Seas.

- Lastly, the Singapore Shipping Association will present the challenges the shipping industry is facing due to COVID-19.

After all the presentations, we will have a Q&A session of 40 minutes.