

Conference Issues in a New Globalised World

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"Apostleship of the Sea in a new Globalised World"

Economic globalisation has greatly increased the threats against the family of seafarers inherent to maritime professions: a healthy family relationship has to be maintained between the seafarer and his/her home in spite of a separation which often goes to unbearable length; the rightful needs of the seafarer at sea (and the means at his/her disposal) and of the family left ashore must be met; some support is given to families, but surely more can be offered or done better, whatever the obstacles to this action.

Globalisation often brings also new dangers for, and new attacks against the dignity of the professionals of the sea, in fishing or shipping: cold corporate financial interests often take decisions causing unemployment, allowing the abandonment of unprotected seafarers, the unbridled exploitation of human and natural resources. The dignity of each person should be the basis of true solidarity, while respecting the human rights of seafarers and their families. "The promotion of justice is at the heart of a true culture of solidarity"

The lack of crew cohesion and the greater isolation of seafarers constitute also an important issue. It can be the isolation of the member of a small crew. It can be the situation of a seafarer who sails among many, but who is alone of his nationality, culture or religion in a bigger vessel. They look for a person to talk to, for signs of understanding and solidarity: the tools of globalisation which can increase this isolation could also bring new ways of breaking it, new roads of communication and dialogue. Those means should be made available to seafarers and their families: a simple example, the availability of email terminals for shipboard use.

The planning and management of port infrastructures is also submitted to an ever growing competition in the global market. It tends towards an always faster and cheaper use of the labour force, bringing greater dangers of fatigue and accidents for seafarers as well as shore people. It can at times deprive many seafarers of a well deserved pause and of the use of port welfare facilities, where they exist. "Seafarers regularly report cases of physical intimidation, confiscation of passports and illegal confinement to prevent any communication with the outside world when the ship is in port". The place and the role of Stella Maris Centres, whether inside or outside the port infrastructures, is an important issue in this regard

The fast growing Cruise industry also brings new challenges and particular problems: it needs a more co-ordinated approach to face them successfully.

The challenge in front of the Apostleship of the Sea is to be, across land and sea, a better instrument of dialogue and promotion of solidarity, it is to be a reliable gangway where ever it is needed, in the Church and society, at the service of the People of the Sea. It is a challenge which may call for a more pro-active role of the AOS and of the Church.