

## Unprecedented increase in piracy attacks off Somalia

London, 20 October 2005

23 attacks have taken place off the Somali coast since March 2005

The International Maritime Bureau has reported an unprecedented increase in the number of serious attacks off Somalia. Recently two vessels have been attacked around 90 miles off the coast over two consecutive days by pirates.

Since 15 March 2005, there have been 23 attacks against vessels off the southern and eastern coast of Somalia. Once the vessels have been taken over they are taken close in-shore and the pirates typically demand a ransom for the return of the vessel and the crew.

A vessel carrying a World Food Programme cargo into Somalia, was seized by pirates and held for over 14 weeks. A sister vessel which went to provide fuel and provisions to the attacked vessel was also seized by the same gang. The pirate gangs appear to have the protection and support of the local warlords and see this as a lucrative source of revenue with minimal risk to themselves. This is a region with a high number of coalition naval vessels who could play an important role in responding to these crimes.

Vessels are approached by one or two fast boats. The pirates on board have automatic weapons and sometimes a rocket propelled grenade launcher. They will fire on the bridge windows of the vessel to force the captain to slow down or stop. Once the vessel slows down, the pirates draw up alongside and clamber on board and take over the vessel.

"These attacks take place in international waters and we call upon the naval vessels in the region to come to the assistance of the hijacked ships. At the very least, they can prevent the hijackers from taking these ships into Somali waters. Once the vessels have entered these waters the chances of any law enforcement response is negligible. There is no national law enforcement infrastructure in Somalia. These waters have become a pirate's charter and unless the international community takes action against these criminals, vessels passing this coast face considerable danger." said Captain Pottengal Mukundan, Director of the ICC International Maritime Bureau.

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