



SUB-COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS OF
TRAINING AND WATCHKEEPING

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UNLAWFUL PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH CERTIFICATES OF COMPETENCY

Fraudulent certificates and preventive measures

Submitted by Vanuatu

SUMMARY

<i>Executive summary:</i>	This document informs the Sub-Committee of cases of fraudulent Certificates confiscated by Vanuatu during flag State controls.
<i>Action to be taken:</i>	Paragraph 10.
<i>Related documents:</i>	MSC/Circ.900.

1 The Maritime Safety Committee and the STW Sub-Committee have expressed concern regarding the dangers presented by the use of fraudulent certificates. This concern has resulted in the issue of MSC/Circ.900, which urges Member Governments to provide the Organization with any relevant information on cases that they encounter. This submission is in response to that request (paragraph 3.1).

Cases identified during the screening process.

2 The cases relate to Vanuatu's scrutiny of certificates during applications for endorsements under regulation I/10 of the STCW Convention. The forgeries would have been difficult to identify by uninitiated persons. In the past 18 months alone, several discoveries were made due to slight mistakes in their completion requirements. The illegalities were confirmed by the Honduran, Ecuadorian and Colombian authorities who gave full co-operation.

3 As a consequence, Vanuatu confiscated all relevant documents, ensured that the persons concerned were removed from their vessels and that they forfeited their right to ever serve aboard Vanuatu vessels. In the case of an officer who held a lower level license (Second Mate) than the fraudulent license (Chief Mate), all documents were confiscated and returned to the Honduran authorities to assess whether the Second Mate license was genuinely issued.

4. Recognising that publicity should bring these instances to the attention of manning agencies and shipping companies, in the interests of safety, a Press Notice was issued in December 1998. Unfortunately, this notice was irresponsibly reported upon in the Maritime Press and probably did not achieve its objectives.

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5 A fraudulent Honduran Chief Mate's certificate was identified during screening in January 1999 and instructions were issued requiring that the officer be escorted off the Vanuatu vessel and that all original documents, with the exception his Honduran passport/visa, be withdrawn. As with any seafarer who has been found in possession of fraudulent documents, the officer will never be employed again on a Vanuatu vessel.

6 Under threat of a heavy fine, the officer was interrogated to determine how and from where he obtained the false document. When questioned, the officer freely admitted that his Honduran license was obtained fraudulently. He indicated that there are counterfeiters who solicit business on the street corners in front of the Office of the Merchant Marine in the city of Tegucigalpa. He indicated that he purchased his fraudulent license from one of these individuals. The business was allegedly transacted in a nearby hotel room where the officer gave a photograph to the counterfeiter who then left the hotel room for approximately 40 minutes before returning with the forged license. The officer was unable to give the name of this individual. The cost for obtaining the forged document was the equivalent of approximately US\$ 150.00.

7 The shipping company concerned gave full co-operation, as the following extract from their representative's response will indicate: "On a more general note, I share your concern about the continuing trend of fraudulent Honduran documents surfacing during the application process. We are currently revamping our own applicant pre-screening process to ensure that unlicensed, and/or unqualified individuals are identified – and rejected - prior to employment by our company. As an example of these new efforts, we are now working closely with the Department of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping of Seafarers at the Honduran Merchant Marine." The shipping company's response indicates that the Honduran Senior Licensing Officer has agreed to screen copies of Honduran documents, and verify the authenticity of these documents during the company's hiring process. The company's representative has confirmed that, to date, no additional fraudulent documents have been identified and that future Honduran applicants will be subject to the same screening process.

Preventive Measures

8 In view of the possibility of fraudulent documents, Vanuatu closely and carefully monitors the submission of all applications, licenses and STCW certificates. Vanuatu regularly communicates with other Administrations when there are any questions concerning the documents provided or wherever there appears to be a question regarding the discharge certificates issued, the training taken, the references given, or other details required during the application process. Furthermore, to reduce the possibility of Vanuatu documents being counterfeited, this Administration uses several methods for protecting the legitimacy of its documents including use of special paper, inks, franking, stamping and imagery.

9 Vanuatu considers that the documents of all Administrations may be subject to counterfeiting. Owners, Administrations, and seafarers alike are being victimised by organised criminal elements. The higher standards of the STCW 95 Convention may, by reducing the number of certificated seafarers, offer these criminal elements more lucrative opportunities for counterfeiting than ever before. Consequently, it is essential that all practicable measures be taken to protect documents against counterfeiting.

Action requested of the Sub-Committee

10 The Sub-Committee is invited to note the above information and decide as appropriate.