

MAST welcomes a new anti-piracy code in West Africa

/EINPresswire.com/ Maritime Asset Security and Training ([MAST](#)) Ltd, the leading maritime security and piracy protection specialist, has welcomed the announcement of a [new code of conduct](#) for the prevention of piracy in West Africa. The code which has been developed by the Economic Community of West African States ('ECOWAS') and the Economic Community of Central African States ('ECCAS'), with input from the International Maritime Organisation ('IMO'), will be signed at a meeting of West African Heads of State in May.



The code is very similar to the IMO's [Djibouti code of conduct](#), which was adopted in 2009, to guard against piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. Both codes enshrine the three principles of sharing information, the arrest and prosecution of people committing illegal acts, and the care and treatment of victims of piracy.

Philip Cable, CEO MAST said: "We fully support the efforts of the IMO, ECOWAS and ECCAS in developing this code of conduct. It will greatly help to reinforce the very real threat piracy presents to the shipping community. However, codes of conduct can only go so far in tackling the persistent threat of piracy".

The key differentiator for West Africa is that the code assumes a commercial security organisation delivering armed anti-piracy services in West Africa; in fact it is only national Armed Forces that are now permitted to carry arms inside their own Territorial Waters, (and in the case of Nigeria the Economic Exclusion Zone). All the West African nations have declared that they will be signing-up to this Code of Conduct which is welcomed; however this fact makes the utility of the new code somewhat limited as nation states' Armed Forces are not obliged to abide by it.

MAST has been operating in West Africa for over a year and works closely with the various

National Armed Forces and abides by all national laws. There is a clear desire by the various national Armed Forces to effectively tackle the increasing piracy problem and a willingness to understand how best to support and protect commercial shipping, whilst at the same time maintaining the primary role of national Armed Forces.

The shipping industry is adapting to this unique environment, by engaging with national Armed Forces, which either embark commercial vessels in the case of Benin and Togo or in the case of Nigeria will now only provide Nigerian Navy personnel on-board Nigerian Navy Patrol vessels. Flag states and the insurers are now adapting to this security environment too. Concurrently the West African authorities are beginning to clamp down on those foreign Private Maritime Security Companies which are either ignorant of these national regulations, or in some cases are not, and are actively promoting these services, which are illegal for them to undertake. Such companies not only put themselves at risk but also endanger the safety and reputation of their clients.

Figures from the International Maritime Bureau ('IMB') show that in the three years following the adoption of the IMO's Djibouti Code of conduct the number of piracy attacks around Somalia and the Gulf of Aden continued to rise. Not until last year did the number of attacks fall.

Philip Cable continues: "MAST has been at the vanguard of establishing and enforcing maritime security standards and is a trusted name in commercial shipping since 2005. We believe the most effective way to tackle piracy lies in greater cooperation between national authorities and private security companies, higher standards of training and increased investment in intelligence.

"Given the global nature of the shipping industry many ship owners mistakenly assume that they can apply the same principles of anti-piracy learned in one part of the world to another. But the waters around West Africa present a uniquely complex legal and operating environment. Failure to understand the nature of the threats in West Africa could put ships and lives at risk."

Piracy attacks in the Gulf of Guinea are rising and tend to be violent in nature. According to recent figures from the IMB there were 58 incidents in the region last year including 10 hijackings involving 207 crew members being taken hostage and in the region of 9 deaths, including Nigerian Navy personnel, in the last six months

Given the unique challenges of operating in the West African region MAST has amended the GUARDCON contract, which was developed for use by shipping companies in the Gulf of Aden and is held as the industry standard, because MAST believes it is not entirely suited to the West African region. MAST recommends the following:

- o When evaluating the cost of PMSCs services offered, ship owners / charterers should consider the size of armed teams, level of accreditations, range of support services and track record in reregulation to working within the law.
- o Ensure PMSC has appropriate insurance and liability cover and has the appropriate

infrastructure in place to support its teams on the ground.

- o It is advisable to use experienced unarmed team leaders from regulated PMSCs who can work alongside the serving members of the various national armed forces. They will provide a critical liaison between the Master of the vessel and the local armed forces, providing guidance on use of the rules of force and operating on a commercial vessel.
- o Shipping companies should ensure that their vessels implement BMP 4 (Best Management Practice for protection against Somali based piracy) on all their vessels entering High Risk Areas.
- o As a large number of attacks/robberies take place around the Nigerian ports and terminals it is advisable to retain the security team until the vessel departs the 150NM point.
- o Ship owners and charterers should be extremely cautious of shipping agents or security companies offering to provide national armed forces into any territory other than their own territorial waters and if in doubt should seek the advice and services of regulated private maritime security companies who are ICOC signatures – (where the company commits to adhering to humanitarian and human rights law).

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