



**ADDRESS BY MR MKHULEKO HLENGWA (MP)**

**DEPUTY MINISTER OF TRANSPORT**

**ON INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SEAFARER**

**25 JUNE 2026**

**BON HOTEL EMPANGENI, RICHARDS BAY**

**KZN**

Theme: "Carrying World Trade, Carrying the Risks"

Executive leadership of the Department of Transport,

Programme Director,

Representatives from the South African Maritime Safety Authority, Transnet National Ports Authority, the Ports Regulator South Africa, shipping companies, port operators, organised labour, maritime training institutions, industry leaders, learners from different

Distinguished guests,

And most importantly, the dedicated seafarers who keep our oceans alive with their hard work and commitment,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we gather not merely to commemorate an international observance, but to recognise a profession upon which the modern world quietly depends. Every day, millions of people wake up expecting food on supermarket shelves, fuel at service stations, medicines in hospitals, vehicles in dealerships, and goods delivered to businesses and homes.

Few stop to ask a simple question:

How did it all get here?

The answer is simple.

Because somewhere, often thousands of kilometres away from home, a seafarer made that possible.

Today, under the International Maritime Organization (IMO)'s 2026 theme, "**Carrying World Trade, Carrying the Risks**," we pay tribute to these remarkable women and men who ensure that international commerce never sleeps.

Their contribution is not measured only in tonnes of cargo transported. It is measured in economic opportunity created, livelihoods sustained, industries enabled, and nations connected.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The maritime industry is the bloodstream of the global economy. Between 80 and 90 per cent of global merchandise trade is transported by sea. Every container ship, tanker, bulk carrier and specialised vessel represents more than cargo. It carries the hopes of exporters, the competitiveness of industries, the security of supply chains, and the aspirations of economies seeking growth.

Yet behind every vessel is a highly skilled crew. These are professionals who navigate some of the world's harshest environments. They operate in dangerous weather conditions. They spend months away from their families. They manage increasingly sophisticated technologies. They safeguard valuable cargo. They respond to emergencies. They protect our oceans.

And increasingly, they confront evolving risks ranging from piracy and armed conflict to cyber threats, climate change, mental health challenges, fatigue, and the growing complexity of international shipping. This year's theme therefore reminds us of an important truth.

**While ships carry world trade, Seafarers carry the responsibility.**

**And with that responsibility comes risk.**

It is therefore our collective duty—as governments, regulators, shipping companies and international partners—to ensure that those who keep global trade moving are themselves protected, respected and valued.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

South Africa occupies one of the world's most strategically important maritime locations. Positioned at the convergence of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, our

coastline stretches over 3,000 kilometres along one of the busiest international shipping routes on Earth.

- ❖ Thousands of vessels transit our waters every year.
- ❖ Our ports serve as vital gateways linking Africa to global markets.
- ❖ Our oceans support international trade, regional integration and economic development.
- ❖ This geographic advantage places upon South Africa both an opportunity and a responsibility.
- ❖ Our responsibility is not only to facilitate efficient trade.
- ❖ It is also to contribute to a safe, secure, environmentally sustainable and globally competitive maritime sector.

That responsibility cannot be fulfilled without recognising the indispensable role played by seafarers. Whether serving on international vessels or supporting our domestic maritime economy, South African seafarers represent professionalism, resilience and excellence.

We salute their dedication.

We recognise their sacrifice.

And we thank their families, whose own sacrifices often remain unseen.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Government, we remain committed to strengthening South Africa's maritime economy as an important pillar of inclusive economic growth. Through initiatives to modernise our ports, improve logistics performance, enhance maritime safety, develop maritime skills, expand ship repair capabilities, and unlock opportunities within the Ocean Economy, we seek to position South Africa as a competitive maritime nation.

**This work is only possible through strong collaboration.**

- ❖ We acknowledge the leadership and contribution of the South African Maritime Safety Authority in promoting maritime safety, protecting our marine environment, and advancing seafarer welfare.
- ❖ We recognise the strategic role played by Transnet National Ports Authority in managing our commercial ports and enabling international trade.
- ❖ We appreciate the regulatory oversight provided by the Ports Regulator South Africa in promoting fairness, transparency and efficiency within our ports system.
- ❖ We thank shipping companies, terminal operators, freight logistics partners, organised labour, maritime training institutions, and every stakeholder whose contribution strengthens our maritime ecosystem.

Together, we are building a maritime sector capable of supporting South Africa's economic growth and Africa's development agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The maritime industry is undergoing profound transformation.

- ❖ Digitalisation.
- ❖ Artificial intelligence.
- ❖ Automation.
- ❖ Decarbonisation.
- ❖ Alternative marine fuels.
- ❖ Climate resilience.

These developments will redefine global shipping over the coming decades. But amid these technological advances, one reality remains unchanged.

- ❖ Ships cannot replace human judgement.
- ❖ Algorithms cannot replace leadership.

- ❖ Automation cannot replace professionalism.

The future of shipping will continue to depend on competent, ethical and highly skilled seafarers. For this reason, South Africa must continue investing in maritime education, skills development and youth participation. We must inspire more young South Africans—particularly women and young people from coastal and inland communities alike—to pursue careers in the maritime sector.

The future competitiveness of our ports and logistics system depends not only on infrastructure. But It depends equally on people.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Today is therefore more than a celebration.**

**It is a call to action.**

- ❖ A call to improve working conditions.
- ❖ A call to strengthen maritime safety.
- ❖ A call to advance seafarer wellbeing.
- ❖ A call to support decent work.
- ❖ A call to promote diversity and inclusion.
- ❖ A call to ensure that those who carry the world's trade are never forgotten by the world they serve.

As we commemorate the International Day of the Seafarer, let us reaffirm our collective commitment to those whose professionalism keeps global commerce moving every hour of every day.

To every captain.

Every officer.

Every engineer.

Every deckhand.

Every cadet.

Every crew member.

And every South African serving at sea—

Today, your nation thanks you. Your courage strengthens our economy. Your professionalism connects continents. Your resilience sustains global trade. Your service deserves not only our appreciation today, but our commitment every day.

Allow me to conclude with these words:

When history records how nations traded, economies grew and societies prospered, it should also remember the people who made it possible. For while ships may carry the cargo of the world, it is seafarers who carry its future.

I thank you.