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SEAFARERS IN THE ASEAN REGION

THE SEAPOL PROJECT

The Southeast Asian Project on Ocean Law, Policy and Management (SEAPOL) is a multi-disciplinary research project with components covering almost all fields of ocean affairs. It was initiated in 1984 and is administered by the Institute of Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, in co-operation with the Dalhousie Ocean Studies Programme, now part of the Oceans Institute of Canada. Initial funding was provided by the Cooperative Programs Division of the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada.

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Foreword

The ASEAN Seafarers Project was conceived at the first Planning Workshop of SEAPOL held on 23-24 November 1982 at Pattaya, Thailand. It was felt that a research programme examining issues relating to the Law of the Sea pertaining to the Southeast Asian region should pay some attention to seafarers who form a major group of sea-dependent peoples. The importance of seafarers is also seen from the fact that several of the countries in the region have been major sources of mariners manning international ocean-going vessels quite apart from their role in operating very large fleets of domestic ships serving both the passenger and cargo trade internally. The rapidly changing shipbuilding technology resulting in the need for much smaller crews to man ships as well as the state of health of the global economy have vitally affected the training, management and livelihood of seafarers. The project is intended to examine both the status of ASEAN seafarers and issues affecting them.

This publication is the end product of a two-year research project generously funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and executed under the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. The project formed one component of a larger SEAPOL Project and for this I would like to record my sincere thanks to Professor Kernial Sandhu, Director of ISEAS, Dr Phiphat Tangsubkul, Director of the SEAPOL Project, and Professors Edgar Gold and Douglas Johnson who provided me much stimulation and encouragement in the course of carrying out the project. Much encouragement was also given by Drs Jingjai Hanchanlash and Sitoo Mukerji, and Mr P.C. Munasinghe from the IDRC Regional Office in Singapore.

I wish to record my thanks also to many individuals and agencies who have helped in so many ways to make the project a fascinating one. While it is not possible to list all those who have contributed towards the success of the project, I wish to thank at least the following who have helped me understand the circumstances surrounding seafarers in the ASEAN region and point the way for me. I wish to acknowledge the support and interest of the Division of Shipping, Ports and Inland Waterways, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), in particular Mr David L. Turner (Chief), Mr Edmond M.J. Corten, and Mr Lie Siao Sing. I benefited much from many hours of discussions with Mr Ronobir Roy, the Regional Adviser to Maritime Activities (now retired) of the Regional Office of the International Labour Organization, Bangkok. My

discussions with Mr Brian Laughton, Secretary of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) in London provided insights into their point of view. Within the region, the views of and information provided by such personalities as Mr Low Ching Chuan, Secretary of the Singapore Organization of Seamen (SOS), and Mr Thomas Tay, Secretary of the Singapore Maritime Officers' Union (SMOU); and similarly in the Philippines, discussions with Messrs Cesar P. Carandang (Chairman), Vicente J. Brillante and Raul A. Alcantara of FAME and Capt. Jose E. Diaz of the Associated Marine Officers' and Seamen's Union of the Philippines, as well as officials of the Maritime Industry Authority (MARINA) have been most helpful.

Visits were also made to many maritime training institutions in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines and discussions with the respective principals helped in a thorough understanding of the situation with regards to the training of seafarers within the region. I wish to thank particularly Mr Leopoldo T. Del Rosario of Magsaysay Lines, Captains R.F. Short (now retired) and R.D. Vardon of the Department of Nautical Studies (now Department of Business Administration), Singapore Polytechnic, for their time and valuable suggestions. Finally, I am most grateful for the support of each and every one of the researchers in the project and for their contributions. I owe much also to my joint project co-ordinator, Dr Mary R. Brooks, for her many roles in the project, including undertaking the arduous task of editing the papers for publication.

10 January 1989

Chia Lin Sien
Project Coordinator

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I would like to thank Chia Lin Sien for the guidance and leadership he showed in directing the study and planning the workshops and I am very sorry that he was unable to continue his association with the project through to its final publication. Without his efforts, the research would never have passed the stage of conception.

I would also like to thank David Moreby for his participation in the Bangkok workshop; he performed his role of discussant and catalyst admirably and the success of the workshop was due largely to his guidance.

Of course, the research could not have been undertaken without the assistance of the country researchers and the many hours they contributed to the papers they prepared.

Encouragement by Kernial Sandhu, Director of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, and the support, financial and otherwise, by John Gratwick, then Director of IITOPS, paved the way for the completion of the manuscript. I would also like to thank the ISEAS Publications Unit for their support in helping me meld the efforts of many authors into this single volume.

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Finally, I would like to thank my family, Mitch, Emma and Nathan for being so understanding and forgiving about the time I have committed to this project and my absences from home.

Mary R. Brooks

Introduction

The sea as “that wilderness of glass”
— Edgar Allen Poe

Southeast Asia, located on the Europe–Far East trade route, is one of the busiest shipping regions of the world and a major source of seafarers for the international shipping industry. In the context of the growing maritime aspirations of the region and the depressed state of world shipping, a study of the current situation facing seafarers in the region was funded by Canada’s International Development Research Centre. This book reports on the findings of that study.

The project involved field research and two workshops, the first of which established the base situation in each of the ASEAN countries and the second examined the issues arising from common themes identified at the first workshop. The base situation is documented in the country reports, found in Part 2 of the book; the papers were presented at a workshop held in Singapore in December 1985. Arising from the discussion at this workshop were a number of themes, which were subsequently developed into a series of papers presented at the second workshop, held in Bangkok in May 1987. The theme papers from this workshop are presented in Part 1. The final paper in Part 1, “The Seafarer in the ASEAN Region: Directions for the Future”, summarizes the findings of the second workshop and underlines the need for an integrated and rational approach to the problems facing seafarers in ASEAN.

In 1900 Joseph Conrad wrote, in *Lord Jim*, that “There is nothing more enticing, disenchanting, and enslaving than the life at sea”. The research presented here illustrates that this is still true today. ASEAN seafarers surveyed often went to sea for adventure and found the work to be hard and the adventure not what was anticipated. In these times of rapidly changing technology, port time is limited and seafarers may find themselves lucky if they are able to spend a few hours on shore. Their legal rights are not well protected and, when they finally break from the enslavement, there are often no shore-based jobs for them. The summary paper recommends a future programme of research that is needed in order to develop a regional labour policy to support ASEAN seafarers who work on “that wilderness of glass”.