

## Security update for Ports in Cameroon

To summarize, the main points of concern in the region are (1) piracy, (2) stowaways, (3) port location (river channel access) in general and (4) sanitary risks due to the Ebola outbreak.

**(1) Piracy:** Cameroon waters are subject to high surveillance by a special Navy battalion called "BIR forces" (Rapid Intervention Battalion).

Although cases of vessels' approach/chase by fake Equatorial Guinean Navy speedboats have been reported while cruising by the island of Malabo over the past year or so, the risk of piracy is quite reduced in the area between Gabon and Cameroon. On the other hand, the Gulf of Guinea (north of Cameroon) remains an area of particular risk (see latest JWLA) and more specifically the waters near Nigeria should be avoided.

**(2)** The issue of **Stowaway boardings** must also be considered closely as the city of Douala is a crossroad for numerous migrants from Central African countries, and the port a high target for stowaway candidates. To date, the stowaways' favorite access way to ships remains impersonating of stevedores (using stevedore suits and cards in order to gain access to the vessel). And while, a Port policeman is systematically delegated onboard ships to assist the crew watchman in controlling gangway access, we can only recommend in view of past experiences (poor attention, frequent absence, indolence, and even sometimes collusion) that your Member's watchmen are instructed not to rely only on these policemen and remain vigilant at all times in controlling thoroughly people accessing ship, including stevedores.

Of course, upon completion of cargo operations and prior to sailing, a careful stowaway sweep should be performed.

**(3)** Yet, despite the above, the main concern while calling at Douala (the country's main port) remains the port's access, and more specifically **the situation of the channel** leading to it. Vessels inbound to Douala must first follow a channel of approx. 50 km on the Wouri River from the sea line.

Unfortunately, the channel is not dredged regularly (last known dredging is dated back to 2010). The official draft given by the port authorities is 7m + tide level. But the most probable draft is 6.20 m + tide level.

The irregularity of dredging affects also the berths. We have had in the past a vessel stationed at berth 11 which touched bottom at all low tides while alongside. Soundings made at that time revealed that the depth at that berth was of 5.26 m in some places, while the official depth on charts is 10 m.

This lack of dredging has resulted in various cases of grounding in the channel. **Special attention must therefore be observed if the vessel's draft at arrival exceeds 8 meters.**

Also, **Piloting** is compulsory at Douala port. Officially, the pilot-boarding area is the base buoy but vessels can sometimes be asked to proceed on their own further upstream of the Wouri River for pilot boarding. Various cases of pilots' negligence have unfortunately also been observed on some occasions, bearing in mind that pilots are protected by the provisions of the CEMAC Code of Merchant Marine, rendering their personal liability extremely hard to invoke. Last but not least, it should also be pointed for your perfect understanding of the "pilotage situation" in Douala that the pilots' community is a much protected one considering how the port's Harbor Master is an active pilot himself (combining both roles). And to give you one last example, he was personally involved in a grounding at the end of September.

**(4) Ebola** does not affect Cameroon at the present time.

**VERY IMPORTANT:** It should be noted that the Cameroon Ministry of Transportation has issued a quite strict regulation that officially bans from their ports any vessel coming from countries infected with Ebola, including Senegal to date.

This measure has however been softened by the Sanitary Authorities who discretionarily and on a case-by-case basis to replace such ban by a 21-days quarantine, to start from the date when vessel left the last infected country she might have called in. Quarantine is due to take place at the base buoy and is then followed by a sanitary inspection before clearing vessels and authorizing a call.

Again, while more and more vessels get to benefit from this "discretionary derogation", it must be stressed that, officially, no official notice/circular has been issued to cancel the ban.

As mentioned above, to date, such measures apply for vessels arriving for Guinea, Sierra-Leone, Liberia, Senegal and Nigeria. However, while WHO has announced they may soon take Senegal off the list of infected countries in view of recent lack of new cases in the country, Cameroon Sanitary Authorities have also advised (unofficially at this stage) that they might consider doing the same with Nigeria, depending in the developments in the coming weeks.

While awaiting above WHO's decision, the situation regarding vessel arriving from Senegal has already lightened locally as we are of the understanding that the Union of Cameroun Ship Agents and Ship Owners have agreed with the Sanitary Authorities that such vessel might soon no longer subject to the a.m. ban/ quarantine, to be replaced instead by a simple sanitary inspections at berth. This agreement is however not applicable yet as it still needs to be validated by the governor of the Littoral region (Douala region).

These are the general points we can advise of at this stage.

However, if needs be of a more personalized analysis of your Member's concerns, we would suggest to be provided with a description of the type of cargo the vessel is going to discharge/load. Particular measures may be recommended depending on the type of cargo and vessel.

We hope the above will be found of assistance,

Please revert should you have any further queries,

Best regards

**Mamadi TOURE**

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