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## Joint donation campaign for seafarers

**The German Shipowners' Association and the United Services Union will donate prepaid mobile phone cards and Wi-Fi boxes to seafarers stuck in German sea ports / handover at the DUCKDALBEN seafarers' club on 15 May 2020**

The German Shipowners' Association (Verband Deutscher Reeder – VDR) and the United Services Union (Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft – ver.di) have launched a joint donation campaign to draw attention to the especially serious lot of seafarers who are being forced by the corona crisis to remain on their ships, preventing them from joining their families: 400 prepaid mobile phone cards worth 10,000 euros, along with 25 Wi-Fi boxes with a total value of 18,600 euros, will be donated for use on ships during their stay in ports.

The prepaid cards and Wi-Fi boxes will be presented at the seamen's club DUCKDALBEN in the port of Hamburg on 15 May 2020. Representatives of the seamen's mission will distribute these communication aids to seafarers whose vessels are stuck in the ports.

**Alfred Hartmann, President of the German Shipowners' Association:** "The problem is becoming increasingly urgent. We are risking the health of the men and women on board and, accordingly, also the safety of the ships – after all, ocean-borne logistics chains are also in danger. Thousands of seafarers are providing an extremely important service, especially at this time, with enormous commitment and dedication and despite all obstacles. In doing so, they ensure that goods of all kinds reach their ports of destination in Germany, in Europe and elsewhere, that the shelves in supermarkets are full, and that we get medication and protective clothing we need. This is why we would like to help them to remain in contact with their families and friends, seeing as they cannot be at home themselves."

The restrictions in the wake of the corona pandemic affect seafarers in particular. While more and more restrictions are being eased onshore, 150,000 seafarers worldwide are



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currently stuck on their ships, including some 40,000 Filipinos, 20,000 Indians and 25,000 seafarers from the EU, UK, and Norway. Travelling home to most countries of origin remains difficult because of existing entry restrictions. For instance, seafarers are partly forced to spend over 12 months on board, i.e. twice as long as usual. Their predicament is increasingly becoming a human emergency since the number of seafarers is growing that cannot be replaced at the end of their mission. Ports often do not allow seafarers to disembark from vessels at all.

**Maya Schwiegershausen-Güth, head of the international contract offices of the ITF at the trade union ver.di**, knows that mental pressure on seafarers is mounting in these conditions. “When you have no protected external contact possibilities for months on end, without solid ground under your feet, and when you are not allowed to leave your workplace, this results in a heavy emotional burden and can increase the risk of accidents on board. In the short term, this campaign will enable us and our social partners to help the seafarers in these difficult times. In the long run, this issue will need to be resolved by political means. Seafarers, whom we perceive as systemically relevant persons, need safe and free communications facilities both in ports as well as out at sea.”

**Dr Clara Schlaich, President of the German Seamen’s Mission**, likewise endorses the joint aid campaign and perceives it as an important signal from the social partners to seafarers, who will now be able once again to communicate with their loved ones at home. “We certainly appreciate and respect their immense dedication for the world economy and for us all when we show the seafarers in very practical terms today that ‘we have not forgotten you in your present situation!’ Seafarers are key to ensuring cohesion of the global economy. They supply what others need, and they also have the right to communication. While we can take that for granted, the seafarers certainly can’t”, says Schlaich.

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