

CYPRUS ANNUAL DINNER 2014

Mr Chairman, your Excellency, distinguished guests, fellows, members and students of the institute of chartered shipbrokers, ladies and gentlemen
Good evening and welcome. Kalispera ke Kalo sorisete.

On behalf of our institute I thank you for inviting me here tonight on the highly auspicious occasion of the Cyprus branch annual dinner. It also gives me great pleasure to be joined here by our immediate past chairman, Tony Dixon, and his wife Gill. I know that he has (almost) become a regular speaker and attendee at your dinners. I hope that I can go some small way to emulating his oratory skills.

Incidentally, before coming here I sneaked a look at the photos on your branch web site, of your dinner last year, which I saw, and is now confirmed before me to be a very glamorous event.

I would like to start with a small confession. My previous visits to your beautiful island was over 30 years ago, which rather betrays my age. I came to Limassol a number of times in the late 70's on the British India educational school ship 'Uganda,, where I was second officer. Those days bring many happy and somewhat distant memories, cruising the Eastern Mediterranean, and needless to say at times a somewhat misspent youth frequenting the waterside tavernas and enjoying the occasional glass of ouzo and retsina.

Needless to say after such a long absence, I can see there has been massive change, but perhaps the one thing that has remained constant is the warmth and friendliness of the people of Cyprus.

As some of you may know I now reside in South Africa, and I am the first member of that branch to have the privilege of being elected as international chairman. I was humbled to be asked and it is a position that I took on with considerable trepidation. I was concerned that being so far from London, I would not be able to properly manage the head office, but these fears were quickly allayed by the competence and leadership of our director Julie Lithgow, whom I talk with every week, and the support and mentorship of the immediate past chairman Tony Dixon. I had to assess how I would balance the affairs of chairing the Institute with the daily management of my business in South Africa. That has not been so easy, but I consider the benefits have outweighed the downside, with the contacts and networking that I have made and enjoyed through the ICS. My most difficult decision, as Tony knows, was to convince my very supportive wife, that I should accept the position. After weeks of discussion, and her telling me that I should not take the position, she finally relented, and agreed. She subsequently told me that when she said she agreed, she did not actually mean that, and I should have known that she meant the opposite!

Now, having been chairman for a little over six months, and had the opportunity to visit other branches, I have become more aware of some of the strengths and weaknesses of each branch, and their challenges and achievements. I am surely stating the obvious, but the strength of a branch mostly depends on the local branch committee, and what those individuals are prepared to contribute. Earlier this year I attended a very professional prize giving in Sri Lanka, which portrayed an active and vibrant branch; conversely I also attended a meeting in Dubai with our director Julie Lithgow, where for various reasons there had been a complete change in the UAE branch committee. Happily our visit led to a positive outcome. But this did demonstrate to me how diverse branches can be, and the challenges they can face. In order for our Institute to prosper, I believe it is essential that each branch should share their ideas and not act in isolation. This could be through the use of an active website and the circulation of a regular newsletter circulated to other branches. The exchange of information from branches can generate ideas, to the benefit of members and the Institute. So one good example would be your under 35 club, that I suspect is unique to Cyprus. Looking at your web site it is clearly successful, and this seems to be me a brilliant idea that could be shared with other branches.

Another great project has been the Understanding Shipping Course, which was developed more than 15 years ago, and has been run with great success in Greece, Cyprus and South Africa. It is a great tribute to the Cyprus branch that so many students have sat this course. By obtaining the support of your Chamber of Shipping, you have ensured that new entrants to the shipping industry get some basic commercial maritime knowledge when embarking on their shipping career. I am told that there are currently 60 Understanding Shipping students in Cyprus that are registered for the 2014 year. You deserve to be proud of this achievement. So, one of my ambitions when I took office was to see the Understanding Shipping Courses rolled out at other branches. I am pleased to report that this project is beginning to move ahead. The course is being substantially reviewed and I hope that during my term of office that it will reach fruition.

Since ancient times Cyprus has had a long maritime history, no doubt due to being an island nation and dependent on sea transport. Despite the problems in the Euro zone, your country has continued to retain its position as one of global leaders in the maritime world, being within the top ten states, and the third largest in Europe. This includes being one of the largest ship management centres in the world. If I compare this with South Africa, where we have a coastline more than four times greater than Cyprus, and a position located at the apex of some of the world's great sea routes, it seems quite extraordinary that there are no South African flagged vessels, apart from those owned by the government; and to my knowledge only one ship management company. It just shows what can be done by cutting the red tape and creating a favourable tax regime, but it also indicates to me that at branch level you are fortunate to have strong support from the shipping community.

Not every branch is able to draw on such support and it is important that our Institute continues to raise global awareness of our unique values of professionalism coupled with an ethical approach to all aspects of commercial shipping. This year some 2 600 students sat over 6 500 exam papers, a 10 % increase on the record number from the previous year. Cyprus had 49 students sitting, and checking back on the figures, I am pleased to see that your numbers have grown by 10% annually over each of the past four years. This year the examinations were held in a record breaking 110 centres around the world, which included such locations as Beirut, Vladivostok and Mogadishu. And, we are breaking further ground by introducing a second set of examinations in November this year. This is really exciting, as this the first time we will have tried to run a second exam session.

Our membership numbers are also increasing: we now have over 4 300 members, an increase of 10% a year ago. The creation of a new data base and the introduction of personal membership cards has enabled us to reconcile these figures far more accurately than before. I urge those members who have not already done so to register their details on the ICS member's web site, and make sure you tick the box to let other members see you. Networking is perceived to be one of the greatest benefits to members, and ticking the box enables you to see where other members are, what business they are in, and contact them if you wish.

Finally I congratulate all those students that have passed their Understanding Shipping Course, and particularly those who have obtained orders of merit for, and who will now receive their certificates. May you take justifiable pride in your achievement. When the Institute of Chartered Shipbrokers was formed 102 years ago, the committee set their objective to provide protection to the profession of the shipbroker by a system of examination. It was through education, they believed, that the ultimate objectives of ethics and professionalism would be realized. We are also honoured to be governed by Royal Charter. This is a unique privilege. The first Royal charter was issued in 1066, and since then, less than one per year has been awarded with less than 750 in existence. This is something to be cherished and to be really proud to be part of. 100 years later our values remain as essential as ever. Education is the cornerstone of the ICS; it is the key to professionalism and the understanding of ethics.

I will leave you with one last point from the minutes of the first committee meeting of 1911. It was stated that a shipbroker should be fluent talker. He (or she) must express himself clearly, and what he says must be to the point.

I hope that I have managed to convey that tonight.

Thank you.
Ef Haristo.