

GUIDANCE FOR GOVERNMENTS CONSIDERING BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE INTERNATIONAL MOBILE SATELLITE ORGANIZATION (IMSO)

Becoming a Member State of IMSO demonstrates the commitment of a Government to international cooperation in the field of satellite communication in maritime transport.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- The role and importance of maritime transport

Maritime transport is essential to the world's economy as over 80% of the world's trade is carried by sea and it is, by far, the most cost-effective way to move goods and raw materials around the world.

- Maritime transport is regulated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO)

IMO is the United Nations (UN) regulatory agency for the maritime sector. Its global mandate is "safe, secure, environmentally sound, efficient and sustainable shipping through cooperation". IMO pursues that mandate by adopting international maritime rules and standards that are then implemented and enforced by Governments in the exercise of flag, port and coastal State jurisdiction. IMO currently has 175 Member States.

- IMSO established by IMO

In 1976, under the auspices of IMO, the Convention on the International Maritime Satellite Organization (INMARSAT) was adopted for the purpose of creating a global mobile satellite communications system for maritime communications, including distress and safety communications capabilities which are specified as meeting certain radiocommunications requirements of the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS)¹.

INMARSAT extended its original purpose by providing aeronautical and land mobile satellite communications, including aeronautical satellite communications for air traffic management and aircraft operational control (aeronautical safety services), and is also providing radiodetermination services. In December 1994, the Assembly of INMARSAT decided to replace the name "International Maritime Satellite Organization (INMARSAT)" with "International Mobile Satellite Organization (Inmarsat)" to reflect said operational changes.

In the restructuring of the International Mobile Satellite Organization in 1999, its assets, commercial operations and interests were transferred without restriction to a new commercial company, Inmarsat Ltd, while the continued provision of the GMDSS and adherence to the other public interests by the company were secured by a mechanism for intergovernmental oversight by what is known today as the International Mobile Satellite Organization (IMSO).

¹ The Global Maritime Distress and Safety System is the technical, operational and administrative structure for maritime distress and safety communications worldwide. It was established in 1988 by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

In 2006, at its eighty-second session, the IMO Maritime Safety Committee (MSC) approved Interim Long-Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) Technical Specifications and decided to appoint IMSO as the LRIT Co-ordinator.

Following the decision taken at MSC 82, the IMSO Assembly, at its twentieth session, adopted amendments to the Convention, "the 2008 amendments" and decided that these amendments should be applied provisionally from 6 October 2008, pending their formal entry into force which has not yet taken place.

IMSO'S ROLE

1. IMSO is the intergovernmental organization charged with the mandate to oversee the performance of all components and the availability of the mobile satellite communications systems recognized by IMO² for their use in GMDSS.
2. Since 2008, IMSO has been serving as the Co-ordinator for the Long-Range Identification and Tracking of Ships (LRIT)³, appointed by the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Contracting States to ensure the worldwide operation of the system.

Every SOLAS ship has to carry a core installation of basic equipment that is applicable to all waters, supplemented by additional equipment such as satellite terminals that extend the ship's communications capabilities according to the specific waters in which she will sail. Cargo ships, including high-speed craft, of 300 gross tons and over and all passenger ships, when engaged on international voyages, must also be LRIT compliant. IMSO's work is therefore vital for safety and security at sea but also search and rescue capabilities with the mandate to oversee GMDSS and LRIT services worldwide.

Additionally, IMSO, through existing international and national mechanisms dealing with technical assistance, assists recognized mobile satellite services providers in their efforts to ensure that all areas, where there is a need, are provided with mobile satellite communications services, giving due consideration to rural and remote areas.

IMSO MEMBERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

IMSO currently has 110 Member States and operates through:

- the Assembly of Parties, which meets every two years;
- the Advisory Committee (appointed by the Assembly every two years and comprising at least one-third of the Member States), which meets on a regular basis; and
- a Directorate, headed by the Director General who is the Chief Executive Officer and legal representative of the Organization. The current Director General is Mr. Laurent Parenté of the Republic of Vanuatu. His term began on 15 April 2023.

² To date, there are two recognized mobile satellite services providers namely Inmarsat Ltd (UK based company) and Iridium Ltd (USA based company).

³ As part of the international maritime community's wide-ranging response to the growing threat from terrorism world-wide, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) decided to establish in 2006 a new system for the global identification and tracking of ships known as the Long-Range Identification and Tracking of Ships (LRIT).

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Membership of IMSO does not incur any costs or financial commitments for Member States as the budget of the Organization is funded through the oversight fees from the companies that provide public satellite communication services and SOLAS Contracting Governments participating in the LRIT system.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Member States do not assume any liability in their capacity as Members of IMSO, as Article 14 of the IMSO Convention specifically provides that “Parties are not, in their capacity as such, liable for the acts and obligations of the Organization or the Providers”.

WHY JOIN IMSO?

IMSO was established under the auspices of IMO with the IMO Secretary-General as the Depository of the IMSO Convention.

As a Contracting State to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) regulating both GMDSS and LRIT, joining IMSO membership is in line with SOLAS Contracting States’ commitment to strengthening safety and security at sea.

Becoming a Member State of IMSO demonstrates the commitment of a Government to international cooperation in the field of satellite communication and maritime safety. It would offer the country the possibility to participate in discussions, decision-making processes, and standard-setting activities concerning satellite communication systems oversight.

The IMSO Directorate represents IMSO Member States at meetings of various international organizations and provides expertise and advice on matters relating to IMSO’s mandate.

HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER STATE OF IMSO

To become a Member State of IMSO, a State should ratify, accept, approve or accede to **the Convention on the International Mobile Satellite Organization, as amended in 2008**, by depositing the appropriate instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession with the Secretary-General of IMO who is the Depository of the Convention.

- A draft model of accession to the IMSO Convention including the 2008 amendments is available from the IMSO Directorate.

The entry into force of the Convention for a new Member State will take place from the day on which the instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession is deposited with the Depository of the Convention.

A Member State may subsequently proceed to ratify, accept, approve or accede to **the amended Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Mobile Satellite Organization** by depositing with the Director General of IMSO the appropriate instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession.

- A draft model of accession to the Protocol and the amending agreement is available from the IMSO Directorate.



The entry into force for the Member State of the Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Mobile Satellite Organization will take place 30 days after the instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession is deposited with the Director General of IMSO.

For more information, please visit our website at www.imso.org