

The Indonesian Government Successfully Repatriates Stranded Seafarers and Troubled Indonesian Citizens from Taiwan.

Together with Indonesian ministries and institutions, IETO Taipei succeeded in repatriating 105 Indonesian seafarers who were stranded in Taiwan's territorial waters. These seafarers were the crew members who had worked for one to two years on the 22 foreign-flagged cargo ships (non-Taiwanese) and faced problems returning to Indonesia even though after their contract expired.

IETO Taipei has been handling this issue since the initial report was received around March 2020. Since then, IETO Taipei has taken steps to approach this issue through a series of meetings with Taiwanese authorities, resulting in 90 seafarers being able to return to Indonesia gradually. At the end of 2020, the program was terminated due to the Taiwan's border restriction policy, which caused foreign-flagged vessels to be unable to dock and change crews in Taiwan due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In early 2021, the number of stranded seafarers continued to grow and reached 413 people. As a result, IETO Taipei resumed negotiations with Taiwanese authorities to enable Indonesian seafarers to sign off and return to their home country via Taiwan. In March 2021 the Taiwanese authorities announced that Indonesian seafarers on foreign ships can sign off and return to Indonesia via Taiwan with certain requirements but still comply with the minimum safe manning regulations, without PCR tests, using special/charter flight and only 1-time repatriation.

IETO Taipei made immediate preparations for the repatriation program by involving the ship owners, ship agencies, and Taiwanese authorities. Indonesian government arranged for a charter flight at the expense of the shipowners or agencies. There were 136 registered crew members at first, but the number slowly decreased until there were only 15 remained. The absence of the crew change policy was the initial reason for the cancellation of crew registrations by shipowners and agencies. However, the cancellation by agencies was also suspected to be due to the increasing cost of the repatriation program caused by the decreasing number of registered crew members. With only 15 crew members remaining, the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, in which case IETO Taipei, decided to postpone the repatriation program which was originally planned to be executed on June 15, 2021.

Due to the prohibition on crew change in Taiwan and the insistence of the Indonesian Representative through the ship's flag countries to immediately repatriate the stranded seafarers, several ship owners decided to conduct crew change in Indonesia and other countries that opened their borders to foreign crew members and foreign vessels. As of mid-August 2021, there were 158 seafarers still in Taiwan's territorial waters and will be repatriated according to the shipowners or agencies statement with the following details: 106 crews join the repatriation program from Taiwan, and the remaining 52 crews will sign off in Indonesia and other countries by the end of August 2021. Furthermore, six seafarers who are suspected of being victims of people smuggling who were also included in the repatriation program. On the repatriation day, there were ship problems and minimum safe manning requirements causing 7 seafarers were unable to join the program, so that only the remaining 105 crews are able to be repatriated.

The Representative of IETO Taipei, Budi Santoso asked IETO Taipei to continue following up the negotiation process with the Taiwanese authorities and coordination with relevant Indonesian Ministries/Institutions so that the stranded seafarers can be repatriated immediately. After went through a series of Coordination Meetings between Ministries/Institutions and IETO Taipei, the Indonesian Government decided to immediately

repatriate the crews with full funding from the country, including the allocation of charter flight which was fully funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia

A series of negotiations by IETO Taipei Task Force Team led by the Deputy Representative of IETO Taipei, Teddy Surachmat to the Taiwanese authorities succeeded in agreeing on the execution of the repatriation program on August 20, 2021. The repatriation program in Taiwan began with the process of picking up the crews from their ships, health checks, registration, checking travel documents at Kaohsiung Port, and sending them to the airport. As many as 105 crews were successfully repatriated to Indonesia using Batik Air ID8025 charter flight from Kaohsiung Airport, Taiwan on August 20, 2021, at 23.10 Taiwan Time and arrived at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport on August 21, 2021, at 03.10 Western Indonesia Time.

One seriously ill WNIO/PMIB (read: overstayer Indonesian citizens / troubled Indonesian citizens) named Tuti Juhaeti, two mildly ill migrant workers, three others WNIO/PMIB, five WNIO/PMIB and their children and eight cadavers of Indonesian citizens were also sent home on the charter flight. Tuti Juhaeti has been in a coma due to having a stroke since August 2020 and no medical action can be taken so that the doctors recommended that the person should be immediately repatriated back to Indonesia. However, due to the border restriction policy caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, her return process was experiencing obstacles. Likewise, the cadavers of eight Indonesian citizens whose repatriation was hampered by the closure of flights from Taiwan to Indonesia since May 2021.

All Indonesian citizens and migrant workers on this flight must undergo the mandatory 8-day quarantine according to the regulations. For those who are ill will receive follow-up treatment at designated hospitals prepared by the Indonesian government.

The repatriation mission of Indonesian citizens, including the repatriation of cadavers, is a form of state presence and a reflection of the efforts made by the Government to provide service and protection to all Indonesian citizens abroad.

IETO Taipei expresses its appreciation to the Taiwanese authorities and all relevant Ministries/Institutions in Indonesia who had worked hard together and synergized in accordance with their respective and important roles in executing this repatriation program in a satisfactory manner.

Taipei, 21 August 2021

Indonesian Economic and Trade Office to Taipei