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ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN YOUTH

Presentations given by HELMEPA JUNIOR representatives during the forty-fourth session of the Marine Environment Protection Committee

1 The Marine Environment Protection Committee, at its forty-third session (28 June to 2 July 1999) agreed that it is of paramount importance that young people should be made aware of the state of the oceans and how to improve the marine environment. It also agreed that IMO should consider incorporating the promotion of raising environmental awareness in youth through the Technical Co-operation Program.

2 The Committee invited two representatives of HELMEPA JUNIOR to its forty-fourth session (6 to 13 April 2000). The two representatives (a girl of 14 and a boy of 13) informed the Committee about the activities undertaken by HELMEPA's JUNIOR Program to protect the marine environment in Greece. Many delegations, while congratulating the HELMEPA's JUNIOR Program, expressed their intention to incorporate activities similar to HELMEPA's JUNIOR Program into their national youth environmental education programs.

3 As requested by the Committee, the presentations made by the two representatives of HELMEPA JUNIOR are attached at annex to this circular with a view to drawing the attention of Member Governments and relevant organizations to the issue of environmental awareness in youth.

ANNEX

**PRESENTATIONS GIVEN BY HELMEPA JUNIOR REPRESENTATIVES
DURING MEPC 44**

“Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of HELMEPA JUNIOR children who sent me to IMO. My name is *Despina Nikolaidou*, I am 14 years old, and I come from the city of Xanthi in the northeastern part of Greece where the river Nestos dominates our natural environment.

I joined HELMEPA in 1997 at the age of 11 and I am proud that I am part of this voluntary effort that Greek seafarers started to keep the seas free from pollution. During the past years I have taken part in public awareness activities, cleaning-up and monitoring beaches, recycling, sending letters to local authorities and the Press with data on disturbing facts we found with illegal garbage dumping or untreated sewage ending up in our river.

At school, teachers voluntarily support the HELMEPA JUNIOR groups in finding proper ways to approach the grown-ups. HELMEPA JUNIOR was created for the purpose to inform, sensitize and motivate not only the children but their parents and teachers. Together we can achieve our common cause: to save our seas and coasts from pollution.

At the beginning of our campaign people wondered what these children were doing but when they saw us respect the environment and explain why we should not throw garbage they begun to help us. We were no longer the ‘little ones’ who did as we were told. We had started to do something positive for our lives and our society during our free time. Today every one is proud of us.

My city in Greece is just a small dot on our Blue Planet, which is like a ship whose safety depends on all of us travelling onboard. All of us, rich or poor, men or women, young or old, must protect this ship.

In HELMEPA JUNIOR kids learn to work collectively and to fight for something that belongs to them, and they do not want to see it destroyed. As one day we will take over the helm we do not want to repeat the mistakes of our parents which harmed our environment. Because we know now what pollution does to the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat.

This is what we want to communicate to children in other parts of the world and to find ways to work together.

I see my friend Stathis and myself, as very lucky children because we both have the opportunity to be here at IMO today. At this point, I would like to express our thanks to the Delegation of Greece for making our visit possible.

In HELMEPA JUNIOR we continue to learn of your work in IMO in order to prepare rules for safety and for limiting the pollution from ships. It is bad that very few people in Greece and perhaps the rest of the world know IMO and your work. They believe that only ships pollute the oceans and the

beautiful beaches. We wish that others on land also recognize their responsibility for the environment and do the same like IMO.

It is important that we, the future citizens of all countries on our planet, learn as much as possible about the environment with the help of a global effort. We, the children, can educate people around us on how they can control the pollution they create. And for this to be done, I ask all of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, to help create similar programs to HELMEPA JUNIOR in your countries. This way the children in your home countries will support your efforts at IMO by standing up and voice their protest for the degradation of the marine environment.

Thank you very much.”

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“My name is *Stathis Costacopoulos*. I am 13 years old and live at Volos, a coastal city of Greece. In the area there are a lot of beautiful beaches and a big harbour with many ships. Because my city is the capital of a region, it has a lot of people, much traffic and litter in many places.

One day, four years ago, our teacher told us about the HELMEPA JUNIOR program. He showed us a video film of HELMEPA with a lot of new things about the pollution of the seas. After that, he said that we could participate in the program in groups of ten. Each group elects its leader to act as our link with HELMEPA JUNIOR and the group carries out every year the activities from the program. Through these activities HELMEPA JUNIOR groups all over Greece compete with each other and at the end of the school year those who carried out most of these activities become members of the Board of representatives and direct the program.

We liked the idea, because in this way we will be able to demonstrate to the grown-ups about the environmental situation around us.

Even though the activities are simple and easy, I believe they help us achieve several things. A recent letter we sent to the Mayor upset everyone. For the first time we ‘little children’ dared ask publicly a Mayor to give us trucks and material to help us clean a beach near our school. Moreover, we told him that he should assist us with keeping the beach clean all year round. He gave us what we asked and now our school along with the municipality supervises the cleanliness of the beach.

We made and distributed door-to-door information material on how our seas and beaches are polluted by us all and asked the people, known and unknown to us, to co-operate. Our motto was, and still is “Enough! Don’t pollute our Earth! Let it be.”

At the beginning, only 27 of us became members of HELMEPA JUNIOR. Now we are 85 and the number is increasing. First our classmates, then our parents and neighbours begun showing an interest and their wish to learn about the pollution of the sea and how to recycle. They themselves also wanted to help.

We never stop reminding everyone that our environment and especially the seas are our common heritage handed over by previous generations and eventually you will hand it over to the next. As everybody can nowadays watch CNN and play with the Internet, there is plenty of information proving that in many cases environmental disasters happen because some people believe they own the planet and therefore they threaten the environment as they please.

Personally, I believe that it is not only my hometown that needs protection from pollution. It is the whole Planet, which is our one and only Home. This is why I want to thank you for inviting me here because I know that all rules for Safe Ships and Clean Seas come from IMO. So when I return to Volos, every time I will see the ships with my friends, I will tell them that our allies in HELMEPA JUNIOR are you at IMO and the people who work on board ships.

I hope that when you return to your countries you will remember me and you will help the children there to start a program similar to HELMEPA JUNIOR.

Thank you.”
