

WISTA - Press (29.09.2010)

Maritime hostage negotiator *Suzanne Williams* is chosen as *WISTA Personality of the Year 2010*

MARITIME hostage negotiator Suzanne Williams, a key figure in securing the safe rescue of many victims of piracy, has been chosen as Personality of the Year 2010 by the Women's International Shipping & Trading Association.

The announcement was made at the WISTA International Conference 2010 in Athens. It comes at a time when piracy remains a huge threat to international shipping, despite the presence of European Union, US, Chinese and other naval forces attempting to guard trading vessels off the east coast of Africa, off Nigeria and in the Malacca Strait.

Eight merchant ships are reportedly being held hostage at present by Somali-linked raiders, and it is feared that as the monsoon season subsides the tally will grow again. At the peak of the crisis in November 2009, the figure was as high as 18.

Ms Williams runs her own company in London, Sue Williams International, representing Special Contingency Risks, and for years has been instrumental in resolving many dangerous kidnap and terrorist cases. While attending the WISTA Conference this week, she has been alert to developments in yet another confidential kidnap case, this time involving a land-based official of a non-governmental association.

She has been to the fore in many highly sensitive attempts to free merchant ships and crew members from the clutches of bandits operating off east Africa and elsewhere, and after giving a gripping presentation on her work to the WISTA International Conference in London in 2009, she was chosen as WISTA-UK Personality of the Year 2010.

A crisis management advisor and accredited senior investigator, Ms Williams has been a hostage negotiator since 1991, having been called on to assist in many life-or-death cases, initially during her 32 years as a London Metropolitan police officer. When she retired from the force in 2008, she was head of the Hostage Crisis Unit at New Scotland Yard. Among her duties, she has been part of the Royalty Protection Group working from Buckingham Palace.

Her involvement in issues related to maritime violence began in 1996 when she was requested on behalf of a British coroner to investigate a suspicious death at sea caused by pirates. Since then she has contributed to working groups on the legislation and prevention of piracy, and assisted in the preparation and performance of counter terrorist exercises involving kidnap and hostage negotiation, many of which were of a maritime nature.

In 2004 she was awarded the Queen's Police Medal in recognition of her commitment to her specialist fields. Her charity work includes acting as a Trustee for Hostage UK, an organisation that supports families and victims of international hostage taking.

Responding to her Personality nomination, Ms Williams said: "I cannot change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to reach my goal, which is bringing value to the sacrifices made by seafarers in the course of their difficult and essential work."

Leaders of WISTA praised the round-the-clock dedication of Ms Williams to her profession, and her embodiment of the values of WISTA, including a deep knowledge of the maritime industry, open-mindedness, a belief in diversity, showing significant achievement, and contributing to improving the image of the industry.

WISTA-UK president Maria Dixon told the Conference that Ms Williams was making a remarkable contribution to strengthening the protection of crew members from piracy at a time when the International Maritime Organization had designated 2010 as Year of the Seafarer. Further, the IMO had taken up the theme for 2011 of Piracy: Orchestrating the Response.

Ms Williams is a member of WISTA-UK.

There were three other candidates for the international Personality Award, which has been a highlight of WISTA conferences since 2006. They were Ms Karin Orsel, chief executive of Dutch-based Management Facilities Group, a bulk shipping company; Capt Adamu Audu Biu, chief executive of the Nigerian Shippers' Council; and shipowner Ms Borgny Edervik. They were nominated respectively by WISTA Sweden, WISTA Nigeria and WISTA Norway.

Some 400 people from close to 30 countries are attending the WISTA International Conference organised by WISTA Hellas, in Athens this week. The assembly is debating the major questions of the day impacting international shipping, and has won praise from maritime leaders as one of the most impressive events in its field.