

Time for SADC member states to confront maritime piracy

Allafrica.com reports that Southern Africa countries have strengthened security in their coastal areas as the tide of maritime piracy treks south and threatens trade along the Mozambique Channel.

As Somali pirates venture southwards in the Indian Ocean where they have attacked or seized commercial vessels since 2005, Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states are taking steps to confront the growing problem that has confronted the shipping industry over the past few years.

The capture of a Somali pirate "mother ship" north of Madagascar last year has highlighted the increasing threat of piracy in the Mozambique Channel -- an important trade route from southern Africa and the South Atlantic to and from the Indian Ocean - and its implications for peace and security as well as trade within SADC. South African Defence and Military Veterans Minister Lindiwe Sisulu told a recent SADC meeting on regional anti-piracy strategy that time was now up for the region to fight piracy. "There is little doubt that the issue of piracy is beginning to be a serious problem to us. If pirates move into our routes, it will cause a detrimental reaction against many economies," she said.

According to the International Maritime Bureau, the annual cost of piracy to the global economy ranges between US\$7 and US\$12 billion, with the direct financial costs varying and covering a wide range of things such as ransoms, insurance payments and the cost of re-routing to avoid piracy-prone regions as well as deterrent security. "We believe we all share in this vulnerability, as piracy is now in our waters. As SADC's coastal areas do not fall within patrol areas of the international anti-pirate forces, SADC will have to take responsibility for its own maritime security," Sisulu said. According to Allafrica.com, ransom payments are, for example, now reportedly averaging over US\$5 million per ship.

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