Mr. Secretary General,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am truly honoured by the invitation to give a keynote address at this Special Event on Ports.

The IMO is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year and it can be proud of an impressive track record in making shipping not only much safer but also much cleaner. The milestone decision which was taken last April on Greenhouse Gas emissions firmly underlines the leadership of the IMO as the global regulator of shipping.

Mr. Secretary General, as a former port colleague, you have first-hand experience in how ports connect shipping with land-based industries and with society at large. The campaign you initiated for last year’s World Maritime Day as well as today’s Special Event on Ports mark your efforts in bringing the global agendas of shipping and ports closer together. We truly appreciate these initiatives and we fully support them.
Ladies and gentlemen,

Ports are not just part of wider transport and logistics supply chains. In themselves, ports are clusters of companies and businesses that provide a mixture of transport and logistics services. This includes maritime-oriented services, such as terminal operations and ship agencies, but also freight forwarding, warehousing and all kinds of supporting services. In addition, various authorities and government agencies are present in ports, such as customs, immigration and food inspection.

Port authorities play a particular role in this microcosmos. They generally bear the overall responsibility for the management of the port estate. You could say they are hybrids, functioning partly as regulators, looking after safety and environment, and partly as commercial partners of shipping and logistics companies. Above all, port authorities have become facilitators and matchmakers between private and public interests. Our organisation has been fostering and empowering the role of port authorities since its foundation in 1955.

Port authorities, port businesses and government agencies handle an incredible amount of data. These data are exchanged and stored for both commercial and regulatory reasons. In the 1980s, the first ‘Port Community Systems’ saw the light of day, electronic data platforms that aimed at electronic data exchange between the various actors of the port community.
In some cases, these Port Community Systems were initiated by the port authority, in other cases it was the private sector, in yet others, it was a public-private partnership. Today we have a thriving international network of these electronic data platforms, under the umbrella of the International Port Community Systems Association, who will be chairing the first session of today’s seminar.

Port Community Systems are the cornerstones of what we today call ‘smart ports’. There are many definitions of what a ‘smart port’ is supposed to be. According to a recent report by Deloitte, a ‘smart port’ is a place where shipping supply services and cargo demand not just meet physically, but also digitally. Above all, ‘smart ports’ are those ports who think strategically about digitisation and create value from information. This ties in with emerging trends, such as the development of e-commerce and the entrance of atypical players in the cargo handling and logistics market. Unfortunately, it also has a downside, which is marked by the proliferation of cyber attacks in the logistics chain.

The port and shipping community is faced today with an overwhelming choice of ‘disruptive technologies’ that offer new opportunities to gain efficiency and effectiveness, ranging from artificial intelligence, Blockchain to virtual and augmented reality.
Big Data and the Internet of Things seem to bring physical and digital worlds closer together. Several applications exist already, but for most ports around the world – and I presume the same applies to shipping companies – the choice remains a difficult one. The mistake is often made that being a ‘smart port’ or a ‘smart shipowner’ means investing a lot of money in sophisticated IT systems, while smart solutions can often be very simple.

Some ports are more advanced in this process than others. These ports have seen the opportunity of making digitisation a full-fledged part of their business strategy and not just a one-off investment. Often these are the same ports that were the first to experiment with port community systems, back in the 1980s. Frontrunners such as Los Angeles and Hamburg, who I am glad to see are both represented here today, took the initiative in 2015 to set up a network of ‘smart ports’ under the name ‘ChainPort’. The aim is to break the often-protective attitude on data sharing that reigns in our industry. To quote again the Deloitte report: what you ultimately need is a ‘smart port network’ where different port platforms connect and share information across geographical borders, so that you effectively have a global chain of smart ports. ChainPort is exactly aiming at this goal.
ChainPort is about stimulating innovation and boosting efficiency within the global maritime supply chain. It has been developed in response to the changing economic and ecological landscape facing the maritime sector, including economic shocks impacting trade volumes, challenges posed by mega vessels, the emergence of disruptive technologies and more stringent environmental standards.

ChainPort puts port authorities centre-stage. As ‘trusted and honest brokers’ port authorities are being increasingly relied upon by cargo owners, shipping lines, and modal operators to perform the function of coordinators and communicators in support of supply chain optimization through intelligent use of data in door-to-door rather than traditional port-to-port solutions.

ChainPort partners are committed to leveraging the latest developments in technology to realize their vision of a smart, interconnected and digital world port system. The initiative brings together like-minded port professionals to share with, learn from and benchmark with each other their respective experiences in their role of supply chain optimisers.

An example: from 11 to 13 October this year, the ports of Antwerp and Los Angeles will simultaneously hold a Hackaton. In case you don’t know what a Hackaton is, it is a creative marathon in which participants, divided in teams, challenge to create an idea in a very short time, with defined themes and technologies. The people participating in teams come from various backgrounds and professions.
In Antwerp and Los Angeles, several teams of creative ‘hackers’ will meet for three days and two nights to focus on six port-related challenges, including mobility, sharing of data between ports, safety and security, process and document flow, sustainable energy provision and education. They will deliver disruptive ideas and potential projects which the port community would not come up by itself. The Hackaton will bring established companies and rising start-ups together and generate innovation.

ChainPort is a platform of frontrunning ports. But that does not mean that these ports are not ready to share their knowledge with other ports in the world. That is where IAPH comes in. Through the World Ports Sustainability Program that we launched in the presence of the Secretary General last March, we want to stimulate innovators such as ChainPort and at the same time ensure that these innovations find their way to the global port community. Digitisation is one area where we do this, but we also work on other sustainability themes, such as climate and energy, community outreach, safety and security as well as governance and ethics. We don’t limit ourselves to port authorities and work in partnership with cargo handling companies – represented through ICHCA – navigational engineers, dredging companies and local authorities.
Ladies and gentlemen,

Before concluding, let me briefly return to the global regulatory agenda for shipping and ports. The Secretary General already referred to some of the main priorities in his welcome address.

Last week the IMO Trade Facilitation Committee discussed the amendments of the IMO FAL Convention that introduce mandatory requirements for the electronic exchange of information on cargo, crew and passengers. In addition, IMO is encouraging governments to use the ‘single window’ concept, to enable all the information required by public authorities in connection with the arrival, stay and departure of ships, persons and cargo, to be submitted via a single portal, without duplication.

Shipping companies and ports both support the ‘single window’ concept. Shipping companies are keen to have the ‘reporting once’ principle adopted so that ship crews can be relieved from a considerable administrative burden. The priority for ports is to simplify administrative procedures and harmonise different reporting data formats so that the same data elements can be reported to each competent authority in the same way.
Whilst we often tend to focus on the different needs of the ship and the shore side in this debate, we should not lose sight of the big picture. Technically speaking, it should be relatively easy to resolve our differences. In the ongoing debate on the revision of the European Reporting Formalities’ Directive, our colleagues at the European Sea Ports Organisation have clearly pointed out that today’s innovative digital technologies often offer far more advanced, more interoperable, safer and cheaper solutions for many of the perceived challenges. Think again about the potential of block chain technology, data pipelines and application programming interfaces.

Digitisation and improved ship-to-shore communication will also come up in other topics that are on agenda of IMO. If reduced vessel speed is going to become a mainstream short-term measure to reduce GHG emissions of ships, then this will need a thorough debate with the port community. The same applies for the introduction of automated vessels.

The port community is represented in IMO through various organisations, of which I mentioned a few already: cargo handling companies (ICHCA), port community systems (IPCSA) and port authorities (our own organisation IAPH). We also have the interests of harbour masters (IHMA), maritime pilots (IMPA), ship agents (FONASBA) and port police (InterPortPolice) represented in this house.
I am very happy to see that the first steps are being taken to establish a close cooperation between our respective organisations so that we, as global port community, are ready to take on the challenges of trade facilitation, climate change, automation, cybersecurity and others in dialogue with the shipping community and the governments represented here in IMO. This will release the true spirit of last year’s World Maritime Day theme: “connecting ships, ports and people”.

I thank you once again for the opportunity of contributing to this seminar and I wish you a very fruitful day.