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Fred Olsen Ship Balmoral Incident In Gulf of Aden

Further to press reports circulating today, Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines wishes to clarify the situation regarding its vessel Balmoral's recent transit of the Gulf of Aden.

As made clear in our own statements, at no time was the vessel 'under attack', and there were no visual sightings of 'armed pirates'.

During the daytime sailing through the Gulf of Aden on Tuesday 3rd March 2009, only fishing boats were sighted showing no sign of alarming activities. At 19.45 hrs that evening, two suspicious craft were observed on radar travelling towards Balmoral. As a purely precautionary action, the ship's Master implemented aggressive manoeuvring, contact was made with the EU Coalition Task Force, and passengers were requested to assemble in safe havens. At 20.45 hrs that evening the EU warship confirmed that the area around the vessel was clear, and the alert was stood down at 21.23 hrs. This was a 'suspicious incident' and not an 'attack'.

During the incident, searchlights were directed at the approaching craft and flares used to indicate that it had been observed. It is possible that this was interpreted as gunfire, but Fred. Olsen Cruise Lines can state categorically that there was no gunfire, and that although the approaching vessel got to within 400m of Balmoral it left the area without incident, and because of the darkness it was not possible to identify the vessel or its occupants.

The Master of Balmoral has reported that the mood on board was good throughout with no panic or adverse reaction from the passengers. The vessel is now continuing on its scheduled itinerary.

Fred. Olsen Cruise Line operates in the UK with four intimately sized ships for a more personal cruising experience.

Contacts



Ellis Orchard

Press Contact

Public Relations Manager

Public Relations

ellis.orchard@fredolsen.co.uk

07557672265



Georgina May

Press Contact

Public Relations Executive

Public Relations

georgina.may@fredolsen.co.uk