

Platform News – National Geographic Magazine reveals child labour, toxic waste dumping in Bangladesh shipbreaking yards

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PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE HETTWER

These ship-breakers claim to be 14, the minimum legal age to work in the yards. Managers favor young workers because they are cheap and know less about the dangers, and their small bodies enable them to access a ship's tightest corners.

(Pictured above: Children working in shipbreaking yards in Bangladesh - copyright Mike Hettwer) **16 April 2014** – The upcoming May edition of National Geographic Magazine features a harrowing account of the shipbreaking crisis in the yards of Chittagong, Bangladesh. The pictures and the video posted on the magazine's website clearly show that children still work in the yards despite the fact that hazardous child labour is illegal in Bangladesh. According to the country's Labour Act 2006, it is prohibited to employ any person under the age of 18 in hazardous industries. The National Geographic article also shows that hazardous substances are released and dumped every day regardless of the 2009 High Court ruling prohibiting the import of end-of-life vessels containing hazardous wastes. Moreover, the working conditions are still dangerous and deadly: the pictures show workers walking barefoot with no protection equipment. The NGO Shipbreaking Platform reported that at least 20 shipbreaking workers died in the yards in 2013, with countless others going unreported as there is no official documentation of accidents in the yards. Thousands of workers have been injured in the yards or poisoned by exposure to toxic materials retrieved from the end-of-life ships, such as asbestos. Representatives of the industry deny the number of fatal accidents and claim that child labour has been banned from the yards – it has, but only on sign boards outside the yards which read "Safety first" and "No child labour". The National Geographic article, written by Peter Gwin is available online [1] and features pictures taken by Mike Hettwer [2]. The reporters interviewed Muhammed Ali Shahin, the NGO Shipbreaking Platform's project coordinator in Bangladesh [3]. CONTACT Patrizia Heidegger Executive Director NGO Shipbreaking Platform +32 (0) 2 6094 419 NOTES [1] You can read the article [here](#) [2] The pictures are featured [here](#) [3] You can watch the interview [here](#)