

Press Release – Bangladesh Shipbreaking Still Dirty and Dangerous With at Least 20 Deaths in 2013

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NGOs Call for Change During National Strategy Meeting of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform in Dhaka, Bangladesh



(from left to right: Abu Eusuf

Mollah from BILS; Syed Sydul Hoque from OSHE; Saki Rezwana from OSHE; Syeda Rizwana Hasan from BELA; Kasheful Hoda from RISE Society; Jakia Khanam from BILS; Patrizia Heidegger from NGO Shipbreaking Platform; Repon Chowdhury from OSHE; Md. Zafrul Hasan from BILS) **Dhaka, 13 December 2013** – Bangladeshi member organisations of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, a global coalition of human rights, labour rights and environmental organisations seeking to prevent hazardous shipbreaking practices, called upon the business and government stakeholders in Bangladesh to join forces and ensure clean and safe ship recycling. During the National Strategy Meeting of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, all members stressed that the shipbreaking industry as well as the Government of Bangladesh were doing too little to protect people and the environment from the harmful impacts of shipbreaking activities. At least around 20 people died in the shipbreaking yards in 2013 according to data collected by the different member organisation of the Platform and press reports – a high figure for a total number of workers between 10,000-20,000. There are no authoritative figures as neither the industry nor the authorities publish information on accidents and casualties. “Even when the High Court of Bangladesh has said that shipbreaking should be strictly regulated and should not take place directly on beaches, but rather in proper structures such as docks, the government does not even enforce its own laws or the High Court’s orders directed to the industry, nor does it propose real alternatives to hazardous beaching,” says Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Chief Executive of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA). “If Bangladesh does not comply with the international law on transboundary movement of hazardous wastes, it will remain a dumping ground for the developed countries. It will allow some companies to make huge profits at the cost of the environment. It is totally unacceptable that environment, health and safety are made subordinate to a deadly industry”. “Occupational health and safety when breaking ships on mudflats is a disaster: the risk of accidents is very high,” says Mujibur Rahman Bhuiyan, Vice-Chairman of the Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies (BILS). “Moreover, workers are exposed to hazardous substances such as asbestos and toxic fumes. We can only estimate the extent of dangerous occupational diseases such as asbestosis that drastically reduce the life expectancy of workers”. “There is a joint responsibility of all business stakeholders involved in this industry to make it clean and safe. Next to the shipbreaking yards in Bangladesh, the ship owners who are mostly based in Europe, North America, China or Japan have the primary responsibility to ensure the clean and safe recycling of their old ships”, says Patrizia Heidegger, Executive Director of the Brussels-based secretariat of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. “It is unacceptable that most ship owners just externalise the cost of shipbreaking to countries such as Bangladesh. While peoples’ lives are at stake, they continue to make huge profits from selling their ships. Substandard practices perpetuate the circle of poverty instead of ensuring sustainable livelihoods.” “Shipbreaking workers are particularly vulnerable with the absence of health and safety rights at work. Establishing healthy trade union institution and ensure collective bargaining power of workers in this sector is therefore essential to improve better working and living conditions, says Repon Chowdhury, Executive Director of the Bangladesh Occupational Health, Safety and Environment Foundation (OSHE). “We call on the Government to demonstrate real political commitment to effectively enforce labour law at yard level towards making the shipbreaking industry decent, green and 100% compliant”. “In 2008, YPSA in a joint study with the NGO Shipbreaking Platform and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) found that up to 25% of the workers in the yards are children. This is unacceptable in an industry that the Government itself has declared extremely hazardous”, says Md. Arifur Rahman, Chief Executive of Young Power in Social Action (YPSA). “Also in the last two years we have documented workers as young as 15 years who died in accidents – proof that adolescent workers are still employed.” The NGO Shipbreaking Platform and its members demand clean and safe ship recycling globally and oppose the toxic trade in end-of-life vessels between the ship owning countries and countries such as Bangladesh, Indian and Pakistan where ships are scrapped directly on beaches without proper precautions for safety, health and environment. They called for a joint effort by Governments, the maritime industry and international organisations to ensure clean and safe ship dismantling. **CONTACT** Patrizia Heidegger Executive Director NGO Shipbreaking Platform In Dhaka: 0171 1188597 patrizia@shipbreakingplatform.org Delphine Reuter Communications Officer NGO Shipbreaking Platform In Brussels: 0032 484 305 556

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