

Draft IMO Treaty on Ship Scrapping Immoral

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13 October 2006 - A coalition of labor, human rights, and environmental NGOs condemned as immoral the outcome of this week's International Maritime Organization's (IMO) meeting charged with developing international law to control the deadly global ship scrapping practice that exploits the environments and labor force of poor communities in developing countries.

The draft treaty does not require that the shipping industry first pre-clean ships of toxic materials prior to export to countries such as India, Bangladesh, or Pakistan, nor does it require industry to pay the bill for cleaning-up past contamination, improving the present situation or ensuring green shipbreaking capacity in the future. The well accepted "Polluter Pays Principle" is not applied in the draft convention. Instead the shipscrapping countries are expected to bear the financial burden of the entire industry. *"The draft convention is devoid of principle,"* said Platform coordinator Ingvild Jenssen. *"First it endorses the universally condemned practice of dumping toxic waste on the poor -- which is immoral enough. But then it adds insult to injury by allowing the dumpers to avoid paying for any damage done."* The meeting has been dominated by shipping industry interests and the national shipping powers -- Norway, USA, Germany, Japan and Greece. Meanwhile, the interests of other stakeholders including the International Labor Organization, trade unions, the United Nation's Basel Convention, shipyard workers, green ship recyclers, and environmental and human rights organizations have been ignored or rejected. "Currently about 95% of the world's asbestos and PCB laden ships are scrapped by the world's poorest, most unprotected, and desperate workforce," said Jim Puckett of the Basel Action Network. "That is immoral, and an affront to both human rights and the environment. But countries like Norway, leading the drafting of this Convention seem intent to perpetuate this disproportionate transfer of harm to the poor." The convention will, as it stands now, come in violation of major international norms and standards protecting Human Rights and the environment. These include in particular UN and ILO conventions protecting the right to a safe and healthy working environment and the Basel convention's control and even prohibition of certain toxic/ hazardous waste transfers. Just last month, a special committee established by the Supreme Court of India revealed alarming indications of asbestosis and death by accidents now afflicting thousands of workers in the world's largest shipbreaking yards in India. *"The recent findings have sadly corroborated all we have been saying about the horror show taking place in South Asian shipbreaking operations for years now,"* said Ingvild Jenssen, coordinator of the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking from Brussels. "The death and disease evidenced in the lungs of the victims and by numbers of accidents, is on the hands of a shamelessly greedy shipping industry, and the governments that protect them."