

I.M.O. ship recycling convention denounced as “legal shipwreck”

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ACTIVISTS CALL FOR BAN ON TOXIC SHIP BEACHING **11 May 2009** - Human rights, labour and environmental organisations warned today that the United Nations International Maritime Organisation (IMO), meeting this week to adopt a new convention on ship recycling, is poised to take a major step backwards from existing international environmental law. In a global “Statement of Concern” signed by over 100 organisations in over 30 countries, civil society leaders today called the draft IMO convention on ship recycling a “legal shipwreck” and called upon IMO delegates to ban the deadly “beaching” method of shipbreaking. “The IMO draft Convention as it stands now is a legal shipwreck waiting to happen,” said Ingvild Jenssen, director of the NGO Platform of Shipbreaking. “It will not prevent a single toxic ship from being exported and dumped on the beaches of India, Bangladesh or Pakistan or any other developing country. We are sending out an SOS to the nations of the world to change their course and at the very least condemn the unsustainable and exploitive toxic beach breaking operations.” 80 percent of the global end-of-life ships are broken in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India on tidal beaches whose soft sands cannot support crucial safety measures such as heavy lifting or emergency response equipment and which allow pollution to seep directly into the delicate coastal zone environment. No country in the developed world allows ships to be broken on their beaches. While shipbreaking can be done in a safe and clean way with proper technologies and infrastructure, and enforced regulations, most ship-owners choose to sell their ships for significantly greater profit to substandard yards operating in countries without adequate resources to provide safeguards and infrastructure to manage the dangerous business. On the South Asian shipbreaking beaches, vulnerable migrant workers, many of them children, break apart massive and toxic ships by hand, often without shoes, gloves, hard hats or masks to protect their lungs from asbestos, and poison fumes. The International Labour Organization (ILO) considers shipbreaking on beaches to be among the world’s most dangerous jobs. End-of-life ships, scrapped primarily for their valuable steel, are considered hazardous waste under international law, because of the hazardous substances they contain, notably asbestos, oily wastes, PCBs and toxic paints. The Basel Convention, a UN treaty controlling such hazardous wastes with 170 member countries, have decided to prohibit the export of all hazardous wastes to developing countries,[1] and they have adopted shipbreaking guidelines calling for a phase-out of the use of beaches to scrap ships. But the IMO draft Convention is at odds with, and undermines the environmental protections provided by the Basel Convention, meaning that one United Nations body is moving to squarely act against another. “Existing international law makes it illegal to export toxic waste to developing countries, to disproportionately burden the poor with pollution,” said Rizwana Hasan director of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) and this year’s winner of the international Goldman Environmental Prize for her work to halt toxic ship exports to Bangladesh.[2] “Instead of throwing a life-ring to big shipping interests, the IMO still has a chance to rescue the workers and the environment, and fulfil its original mandate, by keeping toxic ships off our ocean beaches. [1] The European Union has implemented the Basel Ban Amendment and prohibits the export of toxic end-of-life European flagged ships in developing, non-OECD countries and is in the process of developing EU regulations specific to ship recycling. A EU Parliament resolution also condemned the breaking of ships on beaches this year. [2] Two months ago the High Court of Bangladesh, following a legal challenge by BELA, declared all shipbreaking operations in Bangladesh to be illegal, and called for all incoming ships to be pre-cleaned of toxic materials prior to import. For more information see >> [Statement of Concern on the IMO Convention - 23 April 2009](#) >> [Briefing paper - May 2009](#) >> [OFF THE BEACH! Report - 2009](#) >> [Speech given by the NGO Shipbreaking Platform on the beaching method - 13 May 2009](#) >> [Final Platform speecg given by Rizwana Hasan - 15 May 2009](#)