

IMO funds training for shipbreaking workers in Bangladesh

2011-01-27 16:01:50 Shipbreaking

Today the NGO Shipbreaking Platform sent out a letter to the Bangladeshi Prime Minister (PM), calling on her to not accept a 3 million Euros investment of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) for the purpose of training shipbreaking workers in Bangladesh. The Platform calls on the PM, Mrs Sheikh Hasina, only to accept the fund when the IMO commits to also invest in infrastructural development on the yards, which is crucial for real improvement in the industry. Otherwise, the investment plan will only increase the dumping of hazardous end-of-life ships on Bangladesh's beaches, primarily by western, foreign owners, which results in the continuing exploitation of Bangladeshi labourers and the coastal environment. This week the Bangladeshi newspapers reported on the new investment plan that the IMO is proposing, which consists in giving Taka 35 crore (approximately 3 million Euros) to the government of Bangladesh to invest in the training of shipbreaking workers on the beaches of Chittagong. This was alarming news to the Platform and its member organisations who consider that this investment project is grossly insufficient to deal with the magnitude of the problem. It is rather an attempt to legalise the current practices of the shipbreaking industry in Bangladesh. Reliable sources told the Platform that the acceptance of the investment project was agreed upon at an inter-ministerial level. The NGO Platform takes this opportunity to call on the PM to react and refuse such an investment on behalf of the people of Bangladesh unless it also includes further funding for infrastructure.

In Bangladesh, ships are simply run ashore on tidal beaches where thousands of vulnerable migrant workers – many of them children – dismantle these huge structures by hand. There is no containment of pollutants and no safety measures to protect the workers from deadly accidents, such as explosions or being crushed by falling metal plates. In Bangladesh, last year, 28 young men were reported to have died on the job, local NGOs estimate the number to be much higher since no official records are kept. Also the many people that die of inhaling toxic fumes or of cancers due to asbestos exposure need to be added to the death toll.

Only investment in infrastructure aimed at taking the shipbreaking activity off the beaches of Bangladesh would adequately protect the environment and the workers of Bangladesh, by bringing to a minimum the many deaths and accidents on the yards and by protecting the coastal zones, already severely affected by the loss of fishery and forests. Grazia Cioci, Acting Director of the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking ends by addressing the Bangladeshi PM with the following phrase, *“With our confidence in your righteous thinking and humanitarian leadership, we urge you to request tangible infrastructural investment in the shipbreaking yards in order to achieve substantial socio economic improvement of the shipbreaking industry in Bangladesh.”* Read the [letter](#) from the NGO Shipbreaking Platform to the Bangladeshi Prime Minister .