

## New “Ship Recycling” Convention Legalizes Scrapping Toxic Ships on Beaches of Poor Countries

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**A MAJOR STEP BACKWARDS Hong Kong, 15 May 2009** - At the United Nations International Maritime Organization (IMO) meeting this morning, human rights, labour and environmental organisations denounced a newly adopted international Convention on Ship Recycling as a failure, saying it would perpetuate hazardous and polluting shipbreaking on the beaches of the world's poorest countries, while obstructing transitions to safer and greener forms of ship recycling. *“The new Convention on ship recycling adopted today won't stop a single toxic ship from being broken on the beach of a developing country,”* said Ingvild Jenssen, Director of the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking, a global coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working to stop the human rights and environmental abuses of shipbreaking. *“The Convention legitimises the infamous breaking yards of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and actually rewards these exploitive operations while punishing those companies that have invested in safer and cleaner methods.”* This week the IMO member states rejected a proposal supported by 107 environmental and human rights organisations around the world to phase out deadly and polluting beaching operations. [1] Instead, the new Convention on Ship Recycling will encourage and put a legal rubberstamp on the flow of toxic end-of-life ships to poor countries. The Platform gave the Convention failing marks for: - failing to uphold the principle of the international hazardous waste trade law, the Basel Convention, [2] by permitting companies to export toxic end-of-life ships to developing countries without first pre-cleaning them of toxic materials; - legitimizing the fatally flawed beaching method of scrapping toxic ships on ocean beaches, a practice that would never be allowed in developed countries; - neglecting provisions to substitute hazardous materials used in shipbuilding with safer existing alternatives; and - rejecting funding mechanisms, such as a mandatory ship owners fund, to internalize costs with the polluters and to support use of safer and cleaner operations. *“When the workers and the environment of developing countries desperately needed a life ring, the IMO threw them useless paper,”* said Rizwana Hasan, of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) and 2009 winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize, in a final Platform speech before the Conference. *“This issue of shipbreaking should be taken away from the IMO as they have proven they are not competent to handle global waste management nor occupational health and safety issues.”* The NGO Platform vowed to take the issue next to the doorstep of the European Union (EU), who is due to propose EU legislation on ship recycling later this year, [3] and to other forward thinking countries. They also will forge partnerships with leaders of the recycling and other industries using shipping to promote Green and Safe Ship Recycling and to avoid those using beach breaking operations. *“The fight for environmental justice in the shipping industry is far from over,”* said Jim Puckett of the Basel Action Network, *“When political leadership fails us at the global level, its time to pressure the marketplace by sending customers to the green ship recyclers and to isolate the low-road operators.”* [1] 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. [2] 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, and they have adopted shipbreaking guidelines calling for a phase-out of the use of beaches to scrap ships. [3] The European Union has implemented the Basel Ban Amendment and prohibits the export of toxic end-of-life ships to developing, non-OECD countries. A European Parliament resolution also condemned the breaking of ships on beaches this year. 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](#)