

# NGOs call on Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik to fix “broken” shipbreaking legislation

2011-02-10 16:02:06 Shipbreaking



**10 February 2011** - On Tuesday, February 8<sup>th</sup> 2011, the European Union Commissioner for Environment, Janez Potočnik, gave a keynote speech at the launch of the BROKEN photo exhibition organised by the NGO Shipbreaking Platform and hosted by The Centre. The exhibition features photographs by Saiful Huq Omi, an acclaimed Bangladeshi photographer, on the devastation caused by shipbreaking on the beaches of Bangladesh. A petition letter against current shipbreaking practices signed by hundreds of European citizens was handed to Commissioner Janez Potočnik by Grazia Cioci, Acting Director of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. The petition letter urges the European Union to act quickly and either initiate EU legislation or strengthen existing European laws that would effectively prevent European ships from being sent to South Asian countries where they are cut open and recycled in extremely dangerous conditions, harming workers and heavily polluting the environment. *"This is the kind of thing that governments, international organisations and industry have an urgent duty to stop"*, Commissioner Potočnik said in his opening speech. *"It's a threat to people, to the environment and to our very future."* The European Union plays an important role in the shipbreaking issue: 40% of the ships sailing worldwide are owned by EU Member States. Globally, 80% of end-of-life ships are simply run ashore for breaking on the beaches of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan; therefore, an important part of these ships are European owned or used to sail under European flags. Potočnik acknowledged the importance of the problem, declared his *"readiness to contribute"* to a solution and said he supports the work of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. He particularly highlighted the Platform's coalition partner in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) for their achievements in their long legal battle to get shipbreaking off the beaches of Bangladesh. In addition, he said that *"ship-owners have to take responsibility. Some are already doing it by choosing to invest in green and safe facilities, and by establishing inventories of hazardous materials. But more can certainly be done and we have to provide encouragement and incentives"* and added that the Commission needs to focus on improving the industry, *"We have to make the sector more transparent, more environmentally friendly and above all, a place where people can earn their living safely, without fear of death or injury"*.



According to Potočnik, the way forward is to encourage Member States to rapidly ratify the International Maritime Organisation's Hong Kong Convention. As explained in the petition letter, the NGO Shipbreaking Platform disagrees with the line of the Commission. The Hong Kong Convention, which was adopted in 2009 but has not yet been ratified and will probably only enter into force in the next 8 to 10 years, aims at regulating ship recycling. However, it represents an unfortunate step backwards with respect to international governance, the protection of human rights and of the environment.

*"The Platform stands by its position that shipbreaking on the beach can never be accomplished in a manner which is environmentally sound and protective of human health. We believe that it is necessary to move the operations off the beach and properly enforce the Basel Convention to ensure that developing countries are not used as dumping grounds of the rich, and that the workers in developing countries are given a fighting chance to survive their jobs. Anything less is a sad game of exploitation."* says Grazia Cioci, Acting Director of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. Read the [petition letter](#) to Commissioner Janez Potočnik. Read the opening speeches of [Commissioner Janez Potočnik](#) and [Grazia Cioci](#), Acting Director of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform.