

## Media Alert – NGOs call on Germany: stop toxic ship before it reaches Alang graveyard

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**Brussels, 7 September 2012** – The “Northern Vitality”, a 15-year-old containership owned by German company “Norddeutsche Vermögen Holding GmbH & Co” and chartered by Swiss company MSC, will be heading next week for the shipbreaking beach of Alang in India unless German authorities step in to halt its illegal export. Hazardous materials such as asbestos, refrigerants, oil residues, sludge and heavy metals are bound to be onboard the “Northern Vitality”, either in its structure or in electronic equipment, paints and the ship’s stores. Under European waste law it is illegal to export an end-of-life ship containing toxic materials to India. *“We expect Germany to enforce existing export bans on hazardous waste trafficking to developing countries”,* said Ingvild Jenssen, Director of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, a global coalition of human rights, labour rights and environmental organisations. *“German authorities have a clear legal obligation to stop the “Northern Vitality” from leaving the port of Wilhelmshaven in Lower Saxony.”* Yesterday the NGO Shipbreaking Platform alerted the Lower Saxony Ministry of Transport as well as Environmental Affairs of this imminent breach of European and German law. The Platform will closely be following up this case and already welcomes that the German authorities have taken initial steps to ensure that the European Waste Shipment Regulation is enforced. The “Northern Vitality” was sold last week by its German owner to the famous shipbroker GMS, along with its sister ships: the “Northern Dignity” currently located in Singapore, and the “Northern Felicity” anchored in Dubai. GMS’s business is to buy ships at end-of-life and resell them to the South Asian shipbreaking yards. The economic and financial crisis is causing more ships to be sent for breaking. It is expected that 2012 will be a record year for the shipbreaking yards of South Asia. On the Indian beach of Alang, hundreds of ships are broken every year and their steel recycled. Little or no care is given to the proper handling of the many hazardous wastes such as asbestos, refrigerants and heavy metals trapped within the ships’ structure, electrical equipment and in operational wastes. Once the ships are laid up on the tidal beach, hundreds of untrained and unprotected workers will dismantle them at the risk of being exposed to cancer due to inhalation of asbestos fibers and toxic fumes, or to fatal accidents caused by gas leaks, explosions, the falling from heights or being crushed by heavy steel plates. Hazardous debris and waste are released into the marine environment, burnt on-site or dumped in surrounding areas. More than 100 km of the coastal zone on both sides of the Alang shipbreaking yards is polluted. On 30 July 2012, India made it clear that the “Exxon Valdez”, a ship famous for the oil pollution it caused in Alaska in 1989, and which was sold for demolition in May 2012, would be the last toxic ship to be allowed into Indian waters. The Indian Supreme Court directed the government to ensure a clean and pollution free marine environment. Hazardous materials thus need to be removed from the vessels prior to entering Indian waters for dismantling purposes. *“India simply cannot tolerate that steel is recycled from ships at such a high cost for the workers and the environment,”* said Ritwick Dutta, an Indian lawyer from Legal Initiative on Forest and Environment (LIFE). *“European ship owners let Indians bear the cost of dealing with the toxic waste contained in their ships, but the Supreme Court has stated over and over again that this is illegal.”* >>  
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