

Pakistani foundation helping shipbreaking workers wins award

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2 March 2011 - For their work to empower the working class in view of protecting their social, economic and political rights, the Labour Education Foundation in Pakistan won the International Solidarity Award given by Solidar, a European network of NGOs dedicated to social justice and equality around the world. Khalid Mahmood, Director of the Labour Education Foundation, was given the award at the SOLIDAR Silver Rose Awards ceremony on 1 March 2011 in Brussels. The foundation, among other successful campaigns, tries to organise shipbreaking workers and get their voices heard. In June and July 2010, the Labour Education Foundation got together with local unions to organise 15,000 shipbreaking workers in Gadani, Pakistan to demand for improvements of their working conditions. They demanded that compensation be paid to families of dead and wounded shipbreaking workers and that owners register the workers with social security institutes. They appealed to the Chief Justice to take legal action against the Gadani shipbreaking industry. The union leaders demanded for new hospitals to be built close to the yards, for an ambulance to be present on each yard, and for the enforcement of official safety measures. They also demanded for safe drinking



water, canteens and union rights.

On 5 July 2010, 10,000 shipbreaking workers demonstrated to protest against their working conditions. They clashed with the police and the Anti Terrorism Task Force who attempted to force the protesters back to work and injured several of them. The General Secretary of the Gadani Ship Breaking Democratic Workers Union, Tahir Yusufzai, was arrested and then released. The security prevented paramedics from tending to the injured. Later, the union formed by Gadani shipbreaking workers was judged illegal by the court. None of the workers' demands were addressed. The case is still in court and the Labour Education Foundation is fighting for the trade union to be deemed legal once again. Shipbreaking in Pakistan takes place directly on the beaches of Gadani in a secluded area, difficult to access, where shipbreakers work under slave-like conditions and no precautions are taken to avoid pollution. According to the Labour Education Foundation, there are about 50 shipbreaking yards along the coast, owned by retired military generals and multimillionaire tycoons, who run them in a way comparable to that of organised crime. According to the National Trade Union Federation in Pakistan (NTUF), in the first six months of 2010, 20 deaths and 300 cases of serious injuries were reported at the shipbreaking yards in Gadani. The NTUF said that not a single case has been registered with police because of the shipbreaking yard owners' tight connections with high police officials and ship owners. In a recent accident, no ambulance was available to take the victims to a hospital. The victim was put in a truck and rushed to the hospital. Currently, the closest hospital is located more than three hours away from the shipbreaking yards. The work of the Labor Education Foundation is decisive in Pakistan to put an end to the inhumane exploitation that is happening there on a daily basis. For more information on shipbreaking on beaches: www.offthebeach.org