

## Platform team goes to shipbreaking yards of Bangladesh

2010-09-26 17:09:45 Shipbreaking



The NGO Shipbreaking Platform team was able to see the shipbreaking yards of Bangladesh while in Chittagong. The visit was done undercover, with the help of the neighbouring fishermen. It was too dangerous to gain access to the yards by foot because of the risk of being brutalised by 'goons' payed by the shipbreaking yard owners. The Platform found a fisherman boat to sail amongst the beached ships at high tide and was able to get close to the devastating working and environmental conditions found there. The NGO Shipbreaking Platform was accompanied by a photographer, Maro Kouri, and a local cameraman that captured these appalling yards on tape. The Platform plans to use this footage to show the reality that many refuse to see. The shipbreaking yard the Platform visited was established in 2009 in a plot where some 30,000 mangrove trees were illegally cut to make room for new yards. It was a Bangladeshi Parliamentarian, owner of the yard, that illegally ordered these trees that had been financed with UN money to be chopped down. These trees had been planted to protect the coastal communities from the monsoon season's typhoons that have now been left vulnerable to natural disasters. The desolate landscapes are overwhelming and impressive. One obsolete ship after another are beached along the coast as far as the eye can see. Though breaking was prohibited at the time the Platform was visiting, authorities turned a blind eye and breaking continued, although at a reduced pace. The Platform saw workers working without safety gear, cutting off pieces of the ship that simply fell, splashing into the water, no precautions taken. The view of the beach was apocalyptic, dirty pieces of rusted steel, petrol leaking out and all sorts of other pollutants covered the sand. These once pristine beaches became a dumping ground, a graveyard, for the toxic ships sent by western countries. Fishermen boats sailed in and out between the ships, trying to continue their work as usual. The fishing communities' livelihoods have suffered greatly from this industry. The biggest and tastiest fish that they had once sold for the best price left these polluted waters for cleaner ones and the fish that remain have all been exposed to toxic materials. Also, since the ships are beached without notice, the fishermen are not warned and their fishing nets get ripped. They have become poorer since the shipbreaking activities have started. Their children bathe and play and their wives wash the clothes in this polluted water while they inhale the asbestos that is released from the ships on the beaches. The shipbreaking industry has been allowed to perpetuate a human disaster that can no longer be ignored. If it is not stopped, the damage done to these areas will be beyond repair and the consequences for the environment and people alike will be devastating.