

Media Alert – Shipbreaking continues to kill workers in Bangladesh

2012-09-14 13:09:40 Shipbreaking

Shipbreaking continues to kill workers in Bangladesh NGOs call on Europe to stop illegal traffic of toxic ships

Brussels, 14 September 2012 – At least eight workers have lost their lives at the shipbreaking yards in Bangladesh this year. Two days ago, Ershadul Huq fell from a ship at the Sayed Steel Ship Breaking Yard, in Chittagong, Bangladesh (1). Hundreds of end-of-life ships are dismantled every year on the beaches of South Asia without sufficient concern for environmental protection and workers' rights. According to data gathered by member organisations of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, at least 12 shipbreaking workers died on the job in 2010 and at least 15 died in 2011. Many more workers were injured, sometimes maimed for life. Also unprotected from exposure to toxic fumes and asbestos at the shipbreaking yards, workers in addition suffer and can die of cancer. Following a Court Order in 2009 (2), the Bangladesh Ministry of Industries, and the Ministry of Forest and Environment both issued new rules last year (3) for a better regulation of the shipbreaking sector. Both sets of rules are still being reviewed by the Courts to ensure they include all necessary requirements for protecting the environment and workers' rights (4). In the meantime, ships laden with hazardous waste are still being beached in Bangladesh and shipbreaking workers are continuing to risk their lives when dismantling vessels laden with toxic materials without proper training, infrastructure and protective equipment (5). Last week, about 30 trees were cut illegally to create more space for beaching the ships. Already in 2009, twenty thousand trees had been cut in the same area (6). *"It is time for Bangladesh to put an end to the human rights and environmental abuses caused by the shipbreaking industry,"* said Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Platform member organisation Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA). *"We succeeded in getting the Courts in Bangladesh aware of the disastrous conditions, now the Government needs to act, and also the countries from where these ships are sent - Bangladesh is no dumping ground for the world's toxic ships,"* she added. It is also the responsibility of Europe to ensure that toxic-laden European end-of-life ships are not exported to Bangladesh. In 2011, 35 European ships were beached in Chittagong (7), and already during the first half of 2012 at least 26 European ships were sold to Bangladeshi breakers. In reaction to the devastating conditions at the shipbreaking yards in South Asia, the European Commission published a proposal for a new regulation on ship recycling in March 2012. The proposal has however been strongly criticised by both NGOs and other European policy makers for not providing effective solutions, but rather succumbing to the shipping industry lobby. In July the European Economic and Social Committee, a European institution based in Brussels, said the proposal is "weak and full of legal loopholes", and concluded that "the political will [to solve the problem] is manifestly absent" (8). The European Parliament is expected to debate the issue this coming autumn. *"Now the European Parliament needs to ensure that effective measures to stop the export of toxic European ships to developing countries are introduced – such measures should include an instrument to hold the polluter, in this case the ship owner, responsible for the proper dismantling of ships"* said Ingvild Jenssen, director of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. **Notes** (1) See the news report: <http://bit.ly/Q7ZRUq> (2) See the NGO Shipbreaking Platform's press release of 17 March 2009: <http://bit.ly/O3o1mr> (3) Respectively Ship Breaking and Ship Recycling Rules and Hazardous Waste; and Ship Breaking Management Rules, both dated 2011 (4) The rules need to comply with laws and conventions to which Bangladesh is a signatory : Basel Convention Act (1989), Bangladesh Environment Protection Act (1995), Bangladesh Marine and Fisheries Ordinance (1989), Bangladesh Labour Act (2006), Bangladesh Territorial Water and Maritime Zone Act (1974), Environment Protection Rules (1997) (5) It is estimated that up to 95 percent of the workforce is made up of migrant labourers coming from Bangladesh's poorest districts. As a result of the hard and dangerous working conditions, the population in the shipbreaking yards is young, male and often illiterate. Dr Biswajit Roy of the Department of Occupational and Environmental Health at the Dakha-based National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM) found that 88 percent of the workers interviewed suffered some form of accidental injury while working in the Chittagong yards (cited in a 2010 World Bank survey). Find the survey here: <http://bit.ly/R7xckJ> (6) See the news report: <http://bit.ly/OCdUS0> (7) See the NGO Shipbreaking Platform's list: <http://bit.ly/A89gAS> (8) See entire EESC's opinion: <http://bit.ly/Pz8ANd> **Contact** NGO Shipbreaking Platform www.shipbreakingplatform.org Ingvild Jenssen, Director Ingvild@shipbreakingplatform.org +32 (0) 2 6094 419 Delphine Reuter, Communications Officer Delphine@shipbreakingplatform.org +32 (0) 2 6094 418 [Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association](http://www.bangladeshenvironmentallawyers.org) Rizwana Hasan, Director bela@bangla.net +88 017 1152 26066