

SS Norway: death and disease for Indian workers

2006-09-07 18:09:07 Shipbreaking

7 September 2006 - On 30 August 2006 an alarming report was submitted to the Indian Supreme Court. Its findings revealed extremely high indications of asbestosis and death by accidents, afflicting thousands of shipbreaking workers in India.

Shocking conclusions

The 200-page report was made by a special 12-member committee of technical experts, established by the Supreme Court. Head of committee was Secretary Prodipto Ghosh of the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Generally the committee is rather conservative, yet in this case its conclusions were shocking.

Asbestosis

X-rays of shipbreaking workers show asbestosis disease in 16% of the workforce. Furthermore the committee concludes an alarming rate of accidental death: 2 workers in 1000 per year. Asbestosis is a lung disease which causes respiratory debilitation and failure, and can lead to lung cancer. There is no cure.

Toxic SS Norway

In the wake of these findings the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking demands an immediate halt to the export and import of ships to developing countries that have not been first pre-cleaned to remove hazards. The prohibition should begin with the SS Norway, now lying on the beach at Alang containing some 1,200 tonnes of asbestos. Indian authorities must deny breaking the vessel at once.

Illegal interpretation

India should also cease its unique and illegal interpretation of the Basel Convention, to which it is a Party. The Indian government falsely states that this hazardous waste treaty does not apply to ships. Moreover, the authorities fail to implement their own Supreme Court order on Ship Breaking (2003) which requires pre-cleaning of ships prior to import.

Compensation

All shipbreaking workers and their families afflicted by occupational death and disease, must be fully compensated. To assess the true extent of risk and harm, an independent, international team should conduct a comprehensive health and safety survey in all of the South Asian breaking yards.

In short, the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking demands:

- Immediate cessation of all export and import to ship scrapping activities in India and South Asian shipbreaking yards. End of Life ships can only be dismantled if they have been pre-cleaned of asbestos, PCBs and all other hazardous materials.
 - The cessation must begin with the SS Norway, now lying on the beach in Alang, India.
 - India must immediately cease pretending that the Basel Convention and the Basel Ban Amendment do not apply to ships and ship construction materials.
 - An independent, international team must conduct a comprehensive health and safety survey in South Asian breaking yards. Aim is to assess the true extent of risk and harm to shipbreaking workers and their families.
 - Full compensation for the workers and their families who have suffered death and disease at the hands of the shipbreaking/shipping industry.
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- Initiate legal proceedings against the shipowners and shipbreaking yard owners, to ensure compensation and damages are paid for by those responsible.