

## UK called upon to halt export Southampton toxic tanker

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### 7 More Workers Dead on South Asian Shipbreaking Beaches

5 August 2009 - The NGO Platform on Shipbreaking, a coalition of environmental, human rights and labour organizations, sent a letter to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs today calling on the United Kingdom to seize the former liquid natural gas tanker ship MARGARET HILL. The ship is now docked in Southampton but according to the Platform is likely to be soon headed for the infamous ship breaking beaches of India, Bangladesh or Pakistan, where it is estimated that one worker dies per day either from occupational disease from shipborne hazardous substances like asbestos or PCBs, or from explosions, fires and other accidents. In recent months, the UK has been repeatedly cited for allowing illegal exports of waste – most recently to Ghana and to Brazil. Under the Waste Shipment Regulation of the European Union, the UK is obliged to prevent the export of all hazardous wastes (including from ships) from its shores to developing countries. The regulation was designed to prevent the environmental injustice of rich countries exporting their toxic wastes to impoverished countries lacking the technology and infrastructure to manage such wastes. “The UK must move quickly to prevent this ship from becoming a fugitive from the law and a tragedy for South Asian labourers. They must hold the ship, ascertain the destination and survey it to assess the amounts of asbestos, PCBs and other hazardous substances it is likely to contain,” said Ingvild Jenssen, Executive Director of the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking. “According to European and UK law, all hazardous materials must be removed from the ship before it can be allowed to be exported to South Asia.” According to the Platform, the MARGARET HILL, owned by an American company, is being sold to a cashbuyer for scrap at a price of 8 million dollars, a figure that indicates it is indeed being sold for breaking in South Asia. Only by using cheap labour and avoiding costly environmental protections can a profit from the steel be made at this high a price. But along with the steel, the ship is expected to contain many hundreds of tons of deadly asbestos in its construction as well as explosive and flammable fuel residues which lies as a hidden danger for thousands of unprotected workers. Just this week a worker fell into a tank and died on the shipbreaking beaches of Chittagong, Bangladesh, and yesterday [6 more workers perished in a tanker fire](#) at the yards in Alang, India that took 3 hours to extinguish. In May the United Nations’ International Maritime Organization adopted a new convention on shipbreaking. But this effort has been condemned by the Platform as an industry “greenwash” of the horrific status quo. Indeed IMO officials have even called the shipbreaking beaches in Alang where the 6 workers just died, as being “[very satisfying](#)”. “Contrary to the claims of the IMO, the brutal death of these workers stand as a stark testament to the unsuitability of using ocean beaches for the safe and sound recycling of ships,” said Gopal Krishna of the Platform in India. “Such practices would never be allowed in the UK and it should not be allowed in any country in the world.” Currently over 80 percent of the global fleet of end-of-life ships are run ashore and broken by hand on the beaches of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, where labour is cheap and pollution laws weak, lacking or not-enforced. Today, due to the economic downturn, the ship scrap market is booming, even resulting in the illegal cutting of mangroves in Bangladesh to make room for more primitive shipbreaking yards on the beaches there. Yet in Europe, government owned ships are being broken only in sophisticated yards located in developed countries while commercial vessels are still too often exported even when such exports violate the law. Just this year, the Able UK shipyard, received the French Aircraft Carrier Clemenceau after French courts ruled that export to India was illegal under the Waste Shipment Regulation. “It will be a glaring double standard and a sad irony if the French are forced to use a UK yard to recycle their old ship and meanwhile the UK fails to act to stop another toxic ship from being exported from their shores,” said Jim Puckett of the Basel Action Network, a member of the NGO Platform. “Both ships are illegal to export to developing countries, and both ships should be managed in green shipbreaking yards in developed countries and not on the killing beaches of South Asia,” he said.