

Press Release – Shipping companies’ dumping of end-of-life ships claims at least 15 lives in South Asia in 2014

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NGOs criticise ship owners for irresponsible shipbreaking in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan

Brussels/Chittagong, 21 May 2014 – At least 15 workers have died so far this year in the shipbreaking yards of Bangladesh and India, where the majority of shipping companies sell their end-of-life ships to be dismantled. The NGO Shipbreaking Platform, a Brussels-based global coalition of environmental, human rights and labour rights organisations working for safer and cleaner ship recycling worldwide, is urging the shipping industry to stop selling their end-of-life ships to the shipbreaking beaches of South Asia and instead demand sustainable and safe ship recycling in modern facilities. In May, three shipbreaking workers died in Chittagong, Bangladesh, including 40-year-old ship breaker Mohsin who slipped and fell to his death on 17 May while he was working on the “Magdalene”, a ship that used to be owned by the Hamburg-based shipping company **Johann M. K. Blumenthal**. In another Bangladeshi shipbreaking yard, Amjad Hossen was crushed by a falling steel plate while he was dismantling the “Barbaros G”, a ship that used to be owned by the Turkish company **Negmar Denizcilik Yatirim AS**. Saidur Rahman died on his way to the hospital after a gas cylinder exploded on the “Kima”, a ship owned by South Korean **Sunwoo Merchant Marine Company**. In addition to the fatal accidents, nine workers have been critically injured in Bangladesh, including serious burns to hands and face. Shaju, Rakib and Babu were severely injured on 6 May in an explosion inside a tank, which took place on the “Shanghai”, a vessel sold to the Bangladesh breakers by the leading shipping company **Sammy Ofer (now Zodiac Maritime)** based in Monaco. In the shipbreaking yards of Alang, India, two workers were killed in March while working in Plot 20, owned by Amit Sheth, as reported by the *Times of India* [2]. In April, four workers were crushed under steel plates that fell from beached end-of-life ships, according to local sources [3]. *“The owners of shipbreaking yards in South Asia need to ensure the health and safety of workers, but ship owners such as Blumenthal, who sell their vessels to substandard facilities and refuse to take responsibility for the safe and clean recycling of their ships, become complicit in these accidents,”* says Patrizia Heidegger, Executive Director of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. *“These deaths and injuries are the consequences of these companies wanting to make the biggest profit on the sale of their old ships.”* The Platform has already reported on other major accidents such as the one in April where four shipbreaking workers were killed and another three were critically injured after inhaling carbon dioxide when a gas cylinder exploded in a Chittagong yard [1]. Local people and the workers’ families gathered in protest in front of the yard after the manager locked the gates and prevented them from helping the injured workers. The ship was owned by the Russian containership operator **FESCO**. In January, a shipbreaking worker, who used to be a fisherman, was killed by a falling steel plate at Siko Steel, a Bangladeshi shipbreaking yard, whilst dismantling a ship belonging to American President Lines (APL), a company owned by **Neptune Orient Lines (NOL)**, one of the world’s major containership owners. *“This long and sad list of fatal accidents and severe injuries shows a clear lack of safety measures in the industry,”* says Muhammad Ali Shahin, Bangladesh coordinator of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. *“It shows that the workers are not well trained, their activities are not supervised and they are either not provided with safety gear or no checks are made to ensure that they are actually able to properly use protective equipment. It is very obvious that nobody feels responsible for these men’s lives.”* Sometimes no information is available about these tragic deaths: in April, a shipbreaking worker named Sultan died in the BBC Shipbreaking Yard but nothing is known about the circumstances surrounding his death. *“We only learned about the accident when we found out that the dead worker’s body was to be transported back to his village,”* says Muhammad Ali Shahin. *“Obviously, the yard owner tried to hide the fatal accident. We could not retrieve any further information – this shows the lack of transparency and accountability of the shipbreaking industry”*. Because of the hazardous substances within the ships’ structure, many more workers contract diseases like asbestosis and cancer and die years later. These occupational diseases remain undocumented. *“Most accidents are avoidable. They happen because no precautions are taken, and no proper infrastructure exists on the beaches”*, explains Patrizia Heidegger. *“Workers are crushed under falling steel plates as the yard cannot safely operate heavy lifting equipment on the beach. They are burnt or killed in explosions and fires as safety standards for hot work are not enforced and workers do not wear protective gear such as fireproof clothes.”* The NGO Shipbreaking Platform has informed all the ship owners mentioned here about the accidents that occurred on their vessels and has called upon these companies to adopt a sustainable ship recycling policy that will ensure clean and safe ship recycling off the beach. The Platform is waiting for their response. On the other hand, some ship owners fortunately recognise the dangers of beaching end-of-life ships in South Asian yards. In January, two workers were severely burned in an explosion that occurred in the Bangladeshi yard Kabir Steel on board a beached oil tanker sold for breaking by the Norwegian company Teekay. The Platform informed Teekay and the public about the accident. As a result, Teekay’s director, Ingviold Saether, announced in the newspaper *Dagens Naeringsliv* that the company will change its recycling practices. (pictured: workers lying in the Chittagong hospital after an

accident in the shipbreaking yards in May 2014 - source: NGO Shipbreaking Platform) CONTACT Patrizia Heidegger Executive Director NGO Shipbreaking Platform patrizia@shipbreakingplatform.org +32 2 6094 419 Muhammad Ali Shahin Platform coordinator shahinhelpsgreen@gmail.com +88 018 1953 5319 NOTES [1] See our press release of April 2014: <http://bit.ly/1oQQqFk> and the *Daily Star* article: <http://bit.ly/1gUyiOZ> [2] See the *Times of India* article: <http://bit.ly/1nRsdEi> [3] See the *dna* article: <http://bit.ly/1IOV8qv>