

Bangladesh bans toxic ships

2010-02-24 17:02:31 Shipbreaking

NGOs call on the EU to support new environmental standards 24 February 2010 (Brussels, Belgium) – Non-governmental organisation applaud Bangladesh for implementing the High Court Order banning toxic ships from entering the country's maritime territory. At present, all ships destined for breaking in Bangladesh must have a certificate from the exporting countries proving that they are toxic-free. These measures aim at improving the current disastrous environmental and safety standards of the shipbreaking yards in Chittagong. The NGOs call on the EU to take these developments into account when developing their new legislation. On 26 January 2010, the Ministry of Commerce ordered the Bangladeshi Customs to not allow the import of any obsolete vessel that has not been pre-cleaned of toxic materials such as asbestos, heavy metals and PCBs. By putting these new policies into effect, the Bangladeshi government is finally being compliant with international law¹. Ten ships have been barred from entering since the policy has come into effect. "Pre-cleaning is one of the solutions to stop toxic ships from being dumped in poor countries like Bangladesh and in ensuring the protection of our coastal environment from the pollution produced by shipbreaking", explains Muhammed Ali Shahin, local coordinator of the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking. He adds that this measure will ensure the safety of the workers that, until now, have cleaned the pollutant with their bare hands." Non-governmental organisations are applauding the measures taken by the Bangladeshi government and consider it a major breakthrough in the battle for greener and safer shipbreaking practices. The shipbreaking industry in South Asia is the most toxic and dangerous 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. In Bangladesh, just last year, 26 workers were reported to have died on the yards though there is no official records kept an local NGOs estimate the number to be much higher. Many die inhaling toxic fumes, in explosions and being crushed by metal plates,. Other die later of cancers due to asbestos inhalation and regular contact with heavy metals, PCBs and other toxic materials without any protection. The Platform now urges India and Pakistan, two other major shipbreaking countries in the region, to take similar action. "If they do not start regulating their shipbreaking industries soon, India and Pakistan will end up being burdened by the world's toxic wastes and become the dumping ground for a growing end-of-life fleet". www.shipbreakingplatform.org