

«Help us get shipbreaking off the beach!» – 42 international organisations call on the Bangladeshi Prime Minister to act

2011-01-23 16:01:23 Shipbreaking

On Wednesday, January 19th 2011, the Bangladeshi Prime Minister (PM), Sheikh Hasina, received an urgent letter signed by 42 organisations asking for her help to stop the dumping and breaking of end-of-life-vessels on the beaches of Bangladesh. The letter was sent out by the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, a global coalition of environmental, human and labour rights non-governmental organisations working for safe and clean ship recycling, and 41 non-profit organisations worldwide, including Greenpeace, WWF, FIDH and Friends of the Earth. The shipbreaking situation in Bangladesh is currently at a turning point and local Platform members need support and protection in their struggle to put an end to the dangerous and polluting practice of shipbreaking. The 42 non-profit organisations from across the globe working on environmental, health-oriented and human and labour rights issues called on the PM, known for her government's *«commitment and leadership to protect the environment and the precious natural resources of Bangladesh and reinforce labour rights»*, to ask for her *«judicious and appropriate intervention»* against irresponsible shipbreaking practices taking place on the once pristine beaches of the country. At present, the situation is critical - the future of the unregulated shipbreaking industry is being fought in the courts of Bangladesh. The long legal battle of these past two years, lead by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), a Platform member, successfully got the Supreme Court of Bangladesh to *«finally come forward to address the anarchies and hypocrisies surrounding this shipbreaking industry and, last year, rendered a landmark and correct judgement to regulate the shipbreaking industry by requiring compliance with international and national law»*. This included the obligation of European and OECD countries to decontaminate their toxic ships of all hazardous materials before they sent them to Bangladeshi territory for breaking. But up to now, these rulings are often not respected by corrupt or greedy ship owners, shipbreaking yard owners and officials so toxic ships are still able to enter the country under various pretences. *«European countries protect their own beaches and labourers and refuse to take the responsibility for dismantling or pre-cleaning their own ships in their own facilities. Yet due to the higher costs involved in the safe and sound pre-cleaning and dismantling of ships in proper facilities, the shipping industry continues to use countries like Bangladesh as a dumping ground for obsolete vessels laden with deadly hazardous waste materials found on board such ships including asbestos, PCBs, toxic paints, biocides, fuel residues and other hazardous substances»*. For this reason, in the letter, the 39 non-profit organisations ask the PM to take a stand on the matter, and more specifically, to support the «pre-cleaning» of ships in the exporting country before they enter Bangladeshi territory and to move the shipbreaking industry off the fragile beaches of Chittagong. The shipbreaking industry is one of the most polluting and dangerous in the world, its consequences on the environment and on the surrounding communities are alarming. The number of accidents and deaths caused by shipbreaking in these past three decades go into the thousands. The losses of coastal fisheries and forests are also shocking. In 2009 alone 40,000 mangrove trees planted with UN money along the Chittagong beaches to protect the coastal population from natural catastrophes were illegally cut to make room for new shipbreaking yards. In the letter, the PM is reminded that *«continuing to allow deadly and dirty shipbreaking in the developing countries without prescribing responsibility to the shipping industry [...] shall only mean perpetuating a human and environmental disaster which is far out of proportion to the welfare the industry provides the country and the global environment.»* If Bangladesh manages to ensure compliance with international law it will be regarded as a global leader in defending its own territorial interest against the undue pressure from the exploitive practices of some wealthy developed nations. *«Such a step will lead to the creation of the true global solution – pre-cleaning of vessels and green ship recycling facilities that are off our world's precious beaches»*, adds Grazia Cioci, Acting Director and Senior Policy Advisor of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform.

Download the [letter](#).