Press Release – NGOs Call on Bangladeshi Government to Thoroughly Investigate the Abduction of Rizwana Hasan’s Husband

Brussels, 18 April 2014 – The NGO Shipbreaking Platform, a global coalition of 19 environmental, human rights and labour rights organisations promoting safe and clean ship recycling, is calling on the Bangladeshi government to ensure that the police conduct a thorough, effective and impartial investigation of the abduction of Abu Bakar Siddique, husband of Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Executive Director of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA). Mr Siddique was abducted on Wednesday 16 April and held hostage until early this morning by an unknown group. We are relieved and glad to announce that he has now been safely reunited with his family in Dhaka [1]. These last few days, hundreds of activists around the world have launched online petitions and sent letters to the authorities asking for the release of Mr Siddique. While it is too early to state with certainty why he was abducted, it could be related to his wife, Rizwana Hasan’s work as an environmental lawyer, the Bangladeshi press has stated [2]. Rizwana Hasan, who is also a Board member of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform [3], has been fighting for environmental justice in Bangladesh for more than 15 years. She has been vocal against local and international industries whose activities pollute the environment and endanger the health and livelihoods of communities. Rizwana Hasan received the Goldman Prize in 2009 for her work on the shipbreaking issue, which is of particular concern in Bangladesh where toxic end-of-life ships are beached on tidal mudflats and broken down manually by thousands of unprotected workers. In 2012, she won the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay award in recognition of her dedication to environmental justice. The NGO Shipbreaking Platform and its member organisations, including organisations based in South Asia, are calling on the Bangladeshi Prime Minister to make public the result of the investigation, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before a competent and impartial civil tribunal and apply to them the penal sanctions provided by the law. We also demand that the Bangladeshi government put an end to any kind of harassment against all human rights and environmental defenders in Bangladesh, ensuring in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate activities without any hindrance or fear of reprisals. According to a Bangladeshi organisation, 68 people were abducted last year in Bangladesh, and 39 already in 2014 [4].

NOTES

[3] To see the list of our Board members: http://www.shipbreakingplatform.org/board-members/

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