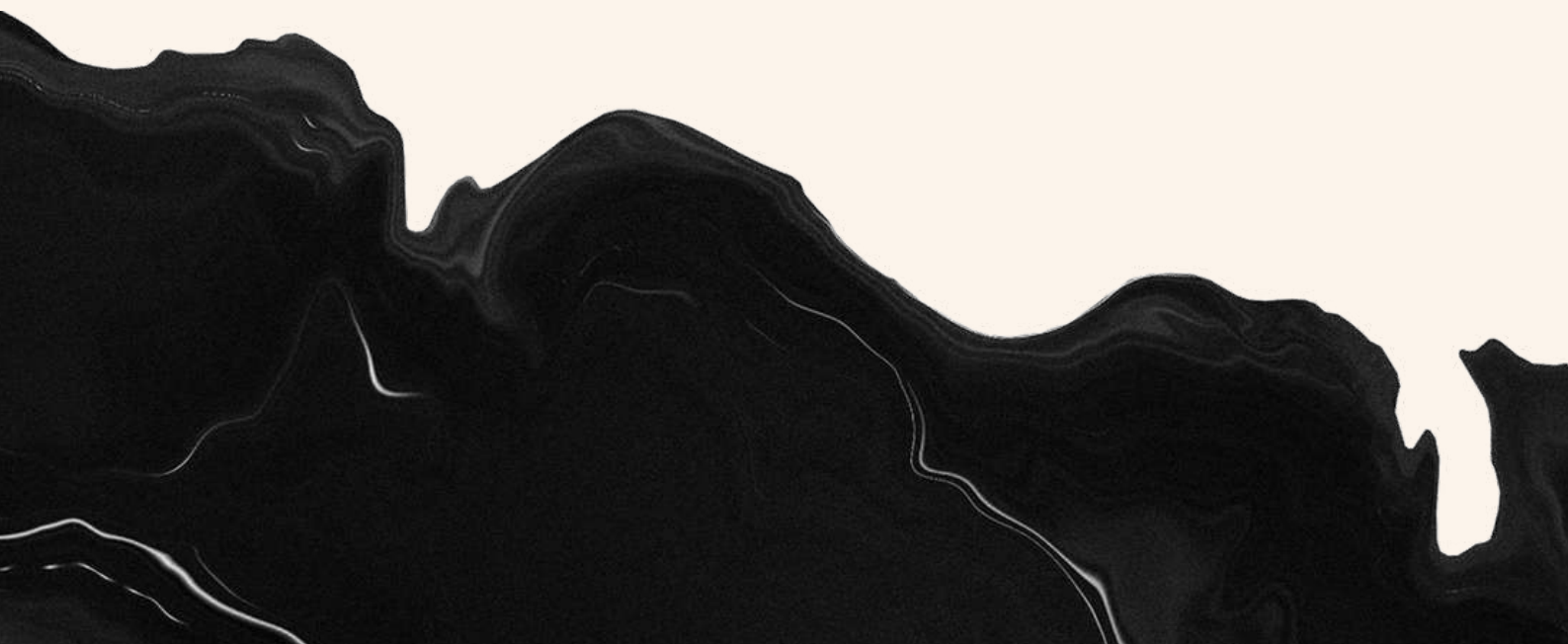


SOUTH ASIA QUARTERLY UPDATE

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VISION & MISSION

Vessels are recycled in facilities that ensure clean, safe, and just practices that provide workers with decent jobs. Vessels will be toxic-free and no longer cause harm to workers, local communities, or the environment at end-of-life.

To act as a catalyst for change by effectively advocating for clean, safe, and just ship recycling globally. This necessitates denouncing dirty and dangerous practices, such as the dumping of end-of-life vessels on the beaches of developing countries. Our commitment to finding sustainable global solutions is based on the respect of human and workers' rights and the principles of environmental justice, producer responsibility, 'polluter pays', and clean production.

JANUARY 2024
SAQU#36

In this quarterly publication, we inform about the shipbreaking practices in South Asia, providing an overview of accidents that took place on the beaches of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, relevant press media as well as research. We aim to raise public awareness about the many negative impacts of shipbreaking in South Asia as well as developments aimed at the protection of workers' rights and the environment.

workers suffered an accident while scrapping ships on
at least
South Asian beaches

8

workers suffered an accident while scrapping ships on
South Asian beaches



03

ACCIDENTS

The accidents are reported by the Platform based on local sources and media reports. The sector suffers from a serious lack of transparency, and it is expected that many accidents go unreported. In Bangladesh, India and Pakistan no data is published by authorities or the shipbreaking industry, which makes it difficult to properly assess the overall scale and impact of the incidents. There is furthermore no official monitoring and recording of occupational diseases of which many more workers suffer, including cancer.

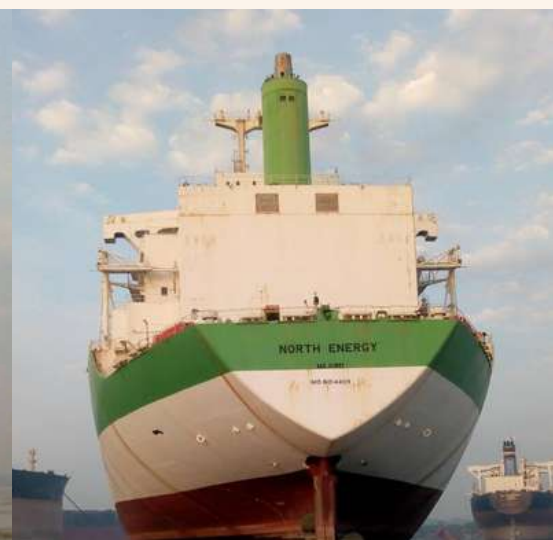
BANGLADESH

On 10 October, Rashel (27) sustained injuries due to a fall from around 8-10 feet while working as a fitter man at Ferdous Steel. The ship being dismantled was identified as HARMONIA (IMO 9132947), owned by a Chinese shipping company. Ferdous Steel paid his treatment at the hospital.

On 29 October, Sayrudun (42) suffered burn injuries on his face caused by oil when cutting a pipe while dismantling an unidentified vessel. The accident happened at Prime Trade Corporation during a night shift. The owner paid for three days of treatment. The worker then went back to his home village.

On 1 November, Tarek (30) fell from an unidentified ship broken at Chittagong Ship Breaking and Recycling yard and got injured.

On 9 November, an accident at Kabir Group yard – Madambibir injured three workers. Minto (25), Rashal (30) and Ronjit (35) were hit by an iron plate during dismantling operations on the NORTH ENERGY (IMO 8014409).



04

On 10 November, another worker, Toha (25), fell from height (around 15 feet) while dismantling the ship GRACE ENERGY (IMO 8702941) owned by South Korean shipping company Sinokor Maritime Co. The accident happened at Narmen Ship Recycling owned by SN Corporation. The yard owner paid three days of treatment.

On 22 November, an accident at Kabir group yard - Shitalpur (a yard that recently received a so-called Statement of Compliance with the Hong Kong Convention from Bureau Veritas and Class NK) caused injuries to Mojib (32), a cutter man at the yard. Mojib injured his backbone when he fell on a steel plate while dismantling the vessel ABDULLAH (IMO 9132923), which had previously been owned by Kabir Steel Re-Rolling Mills (KSRM). The yard owner paid for Mojib's treatment.

DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGLADESH

YARD OWNER SUED OVER A SHIPBREAKING WORKER'S DEATH

Following the death of Md. Russell (24) on the 26th of August at a shipbreaking yard in Chattogram, six people were sued over Russell's death. On 1 October, his father filed a case at the Chattogram Judicial Magistrate Court. The shipbreaking owner, Asaduzzaman Swapan, the contractor, a cutterman, and the Sitakunda police station Officer face charges of murder and concealing the victim's body. It is claimed that Russell refused to follow orders to swim out to a vessel, which led to a heavy disagreement with the yard owner and the contractor. It is believed that Russel drowned. His body was found on 2 September and his father has accused the yard owner and the contractor of being involved in his son's death, as well as of making threats against him.

05

SIGNIFICANT TONNAGE DECLINE IN BANGLADESH

Despite Bangladesh being the world's number one shipbreaking destination in 2023, with the import of vessels rising 36% compared to the same period of 2022, the industry claims that there has been a significant decline in tonnage of imported vessels. They attribute this to setbacks in opening letters of credit following the current US dollar crisis. According to the industry, the difficulties in opening letters of credit has hindered the import of large vessels up to 40.000-50.000 tonnes in average, and instead only allowed for the import of smaller ships sized 2.000 tonnes.

A RALLY TO SUPPORT SHIPBREAKING WORKERS' RIGHTS WAS HELD IN CHATTOGRAM

On 30 December, the Shipbreaking Workers Safety Committee organised a human chain to advocate for the rights and well-being of shipbreaking workers. The demands listed cover various aspects related to the safety and overall welfare of workers in the shipbreaking industry such as the establishment of compensation standards for shipbreaking workers victims of accidents, the enforcement of occupational health and safety measures, income guarantees for the families of accident victims, the provision of adequate healthcare facilities in accordance with International Labour Standards, ILO guidelines (ILO Conventions 102 and 121), the Fatal Accidents Act 1855 as well as High Court directives. The workers demand measures are taken to ensure a secure working environment, including stricter regulations and amendments of labour laws, and to ensure accountability of employers and relevant state labour departments. Accident statistics, although not fully completed nor reported, further underscores the current serious lack of safety measures in shipbreaking.

06

DEVELOPMENTS IN INDIA

STEEL MINISTRY DOES NOT APPROVE THE USE OF TMT BARS FROM SHIPBREAKING

A Committee established by India's Steel Ministry disqualified the use of shipbreaking steel plates for the production of thermos-mechanical treated (TMT) steel. The Committee includes representatives from MECON (under the Ministry of Steel), NISST (National Institute of Secondary Steel Technology), Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, Bureau of Indian Standards, Material Recycling Association of India (MRAI), MSTC Ltd (under the Ministry of Steel), Ship Recycling Industries Association, and Gujarat Maritime Board. Steel samples were collected from three shipbreaking yards in Alang (plots 39, 13, 23 and 24) and from different parts of ships used in international and coastal trade. The samples were tested after being rolled into TMT bars, a process aimed at increasing steel mechanical properties such as ductility, hardness, corrosion resistance and yield strength. The Committee's conclusion to not accept scrap steel from shipbreaking was based on the lack of comprehensive data to assess the structural integrity of TMT bars made from ship plates. They identified the necessity for comprehensive studies on the behaviour of beams, columns, and joints using these rebars, but found that incorporating recovered ship plates into steel production, considering the diverse applications, does not ensure that quality standards are met.

DEVELOPMENTS IN PAKISTAN

PAKISTAN RATIFIES THE HONG KONG CONVENTION

The Government of Pakistan is the 23rd country to ratify the Hong Kong Convention. All three major shipbreaking countries using the beaching method, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, have now ratified the Convention which will enter into force in June 2025. The Convention's entry-into-force provides the opportunity to amend and strengthen the overall weak standards of the Convention. Beaching remains the worst industrial practice for ship recycling and should be phased out. The Hong Kong Convention must also align itself with international environmental law and catch up with developments since its adoption in 2009. Most recently, the UAE adopted a new Ship Recycling Regulation which bans the use of beaching and landing methods, and calls for the use of dry-docks.

07

JUST TRANSITION IN THE SHIPBREAKING INDUSTRY IN BANGLADESH

Just transition is defined by the United Nations as a tool that ensures that the shift toward low-carbon and environmentally sustainable economies does not disproportionately harm vulnerable groups or communities, emphasising the interconnectedness between environmental sustainability, social justice, and economic development. The idea is to address social and economic inequalities that may arise during the transition, particularly in industries that are heavily reliant on high-carbon or environmentally harmful practices. By prioritising just transition, countries aim to create policies and strategies that not only mitigate climate change but also take into account the welfare of workers, communities, and marginalised groups who might face economic or social disruptions due to these changes.

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries when it comes to global change, including rising sea levels and frequent cyclones that will affect particularly the most vulnerable communities. Bangladesh also has many industrial sectors that will need reform to adequately address climate change and pollution. One such sector is shipbreaking, currently conducted on the tidal beach of Chattogram.

Every year a large number of workers from northern villages of Bangladesh, mainly under the districts of Bogra, Rongpur and Kurigram, migrate to Sitakunda, Chattogram, to obtain work at the shipbreaking yards. Conditions there are dangerous, and workers put both their health and lives at risk when taking apart the large vessels that have been sold by shipping companies globally for scrapping. The workers leave their home villages due to extreme poverty and a lack of livelihood opportunities in the northern part of Bangladesh. The lack of adequate representation and organisation of shipbreaking workers further exacerbates their vulnerability, allowing their exploitation and often leaving them without proper compensation or support in case of accidents or injuries.

Many shipbreaking workers dream of an alternative livelihood. Addressing this issue requires the implementation of policies that support the economic development of rural areas and create new job opportunities. Efforts to empower workers through education, unionisation, and advocacy for decent work can significantly improve their situation.

08

In this South Asia Quarterly Update, we interview Repon Chowdhury and talk about just transition, the work of Bangladesh Occupational Health, Safety and Environment Foundation (OSHE) on the issue and the importance of just transition in the shipbreaking sector. Repon is not only the founder of OSHE, a Platform member organisation, but also the Secretary General of the Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress (BFTUC) with 25 years of experience in the area of labour policy, industrial relations, and occupational health, safety and environmental issues. Repon is one of the leading occupational, safety and health rights activist in the Asian region contributing towards promotion of decent work, just transition for workers and occupational, health and safety rights issues.

**What is, in your opinion, the role of just transition in Bangladesh?**

Before we start talking about the role of just transition in Bangladesh, we need to first be clear about its core definition. Businesses are challenged to move towards climate neutral and economic societies that are greener and more resilient through just transitioning. Just transition means greening the economy in a way that is fair, as inclusive as possible, creating decent working opportunities in which no one is left behind. These are the basic foundations of just transition. The aim is to maximise the social and economic opportunities for climate actions, while minimizing and carefully managing any challenges through effective social dialogue among all groups impacted, respecting the fundamental principles of workers' rights. In that regard, it is key to understand the national context.

09

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries facing devastating impacts of climate change. For decades, we have faced numerous challenges including sea level rise, change in patterns of cyclones and storm surges, flooding and famines. Just transition becomes thus a vital instrument to address the climate change impacts and to stop environmental degradation caused by current industrial activities. It aims at minimising the harm to the environment, labourers and local communities. A number of sectors have been identified as needing to go through a just transition process, and shipbreaking is one of the prioritised sectors. There is strong local pressure to transform this sector following more than 40 years of pollution and harm caused to the labourers and local communities' health. We need holistic and combined efforts to face these issues, and in OSHE's view just transition is a pathway for the shipbreaking sector to transform and address the economic, environmental and social challenges, while safeguarding human rights and environmental justice in the transition process.

What would just transition ideally look like in the shipbreaking sector?

The shipbreaking industry in Bangladesh has become one of the largest shipbreaking nations in the world because huge profits have been rendered possible by ignoring environmental, labour, social and health requirements. Overall, this industry is operating with little to no oversight, and this needs to change. While the industry obviously wants to make money, and the government sees the industry as a source of economic revenue, there is no long-term plan on how to transform the sector in a just and sustainable way. Just transition is, in this case, a pathway that needs to be explored and involve the government, the employers, trade unions, local communities and NGOs to identify the gaps and bottle necks for a just transition. Community actions, skilling and reskilling, and good governance must be secured. This requires an effective social dialogue so that the transition becomes real, and not just another example of greenwashing. The transition in the shipbreaking sector must for example effectively address the environmental and human rights aspects as well as promote good governance mechanisms, technological innovation, and accordingly deliver social and environmental justice. It must also seriously tailor for alternative livelihoods that can offer decent job opportunities when the shift involves transitioning from more labour intensive to technology driven operations, and when considerations of environmental justice are put at the heart of discussions. Bangladesh cannot continue to be the dumping ground for the world's toxic waste.

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What challenges do you foresee in implementing a just transition in Bangladesh, and for the shipbreaking sector specifically?

Just transition is a new concept in Bangladesh which is acknowledged in the preambles of the Paris Agreement. The working program on just transition pathways has been developed during the recent COP 28 in the United Arab Emirates. There are solid international commitments to operate just transition in order to address green paths in reducing carbon emission, footprints and the harm to local environments, making the industrial processes sustainable. There are, however, still many policy gaps that need to be addressed. We have not yet seen a solid and serious commitment from the Bangladesh government in their policy and national programs. OSHE will continue to advocate for better policy at the national level as well as efficient mechanisms to secure effective implementation of national policy initiatives, commitments and action programs developed to secure environmental and social justice. But we need a collective approach, public consultations and partnerships in order to operationalise just transition in Bangladesh.

What has been the experience of OSHE as a Bangladeshi NGO focused on just transition?

OSHE has been a leading organisation in introducing and promoting just transition at the national level. In the last decade, we have been involved at the national, international and United Nations level engaging with different groups on just transition issues. We have participated in different COPs, including the Paris Agreement. We started translating the concept of just transition to the national context more than 10 years ago, starting with sensitisation, awareness and knowledge-building. We organised a series of dialogues and trainings, awareness sessions and sectorial networks as a starting point addressing climate change, pollution, health and safety, environmental and public health challenges, workers' health challenges, green skilling, social protection in different sectors, including the shipbreaking sector. The next step is more challenging and involves establishing very effective social dialogues and addressing the policy gaps. National tools such as an informative website, network and stakeholder consultations are already developed. Now we have to enter the next phase and start developing programs of just transition. Labour rights and environmental groups need to be in the forefront and engage with the employers.

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Just transition requires continuous actions and involves developing national sectorial policies, company level policies, workplace policies and partnerships between employers, workers and local actors. In the shipbreaking sector there needs to be real action and commitment in order to stop the environmental pollution caused by beaching. Moreover, the sector has serious challenges related to labour rights and fundamental principles of decent work. Every year we see workers dying at the workplace because of dangerous working conditions. Chemical toxic exposure in both workers and surrounding communities is a serious concern as well. People are slowly dying because of a poisonous environment. It is also reducing the working capacity of the people living in the area near the shipbreaking yards. Numerous workers are facing long term disease and loss of livelihoods. Injured workers are often left to go back to their homes with a disability that undermines their working potential. Therefore, we need alternative livelihoods, for the injured workers and also for those that will be replaced by cleaner technologies such as mechanical cutting. The current unhealthy working environment cannot be allowed to persist. Alternative livelihoods for shipbreaking workers is a priority for us in order to give new opportunities for people who do not want to work and risk their lives in this hazardous industry anymore. Since one of the main principles of just transition is social protection, giving an opportunity for people to experience their full economic potential and enable them to find new skills and ways of livelihood in a context of green economy and sustainable jobs is very important.

How do you see this becoming a reality?

Financial resources and skilling and reskilling programs need to be backed up by comprehensive national and sectoral commitments and institutional mechanisms. Financial support is needed to bring workers to the next level of transition and to create alternative livelihoods. Today, many workers go back to their home villages, Bogra, Rangpur and Kurigram, with nothing, and they want a real change. They want to get out of poverty and rebuild their lives in a sustainable way. They are looking for alternative livelihoods within their local communities. The primary field-level assessment we conducted last year also indicated that workers are interested in sustainable agriculture training, self-employment opportunities to start small businesses, such as tea shops.

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Besides this, some of them are interested in becoming solar technicians, irrigation technicians, etc. There is a huge and continuously growing demand from the shipbreaking workers that the government must pave the way for alternative livelihoods because shipbreaking has had very little change over the years and the workers know that they are risking their lives. Economic and social support is needed for these people. OSHE, together with the NGO Shipbreaking Platform and other local actors, are trying to mobilise funding for alternative livelihood programs. We are looking for funding sources so that we can help develop good local examples and practices involving alternative livelihoods in the context of just transition and social protection. The successes of this program will serve as an inspiration for the development of other programs. A long-term effect will be created at the local level and vulnerable workers' lives will be changed forever. They will find new opportunities and move forward to a new life, emerging from poverty. Also the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) call for a transition: SDG 1 calls for the end poverty in all its forms everywhere, SDG 8 calls for sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, SDG 7 calls for access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all and SDG 13 requires urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Ending poverty and ensuring a just transition calls for a radical shift away from polluting industrial practices and it is high time that the Bangladesh government shifts its focus towards new and greener industrial policies.

Which insights have you taken from the recent COP 28 discussions on just transition?

We have seen huge ambitions from civil society, but from the outcome statements we know that a lot of progress still has to be made. While we need stronger ambitions in the coming COPs, we cannot wait for discussions, we need real actions. There are no jobs on a dead planet and we are running out of time to ensure the survival of future generations. Just transition is an opportunity to move away from industry that harms our planet. Just transition is also needed to ensure support for the needed shift towards a sustainable global economy. We will not solve the climate crisis if we leave large parts of the population without a decent, and green, job.

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RESEARCH & READINGS

2022

This study researched the occurrence of emerging pollutants in Alang and analysed physio-chemicals variables in marine waters and sediments. Primary data was collected between February and December 2021 at low tides from the intertidal zone. The samples were collected from the depth of 40 to 50 cm in plastic bags while coastal surface seawater samples were collected in clean bottles on a bimonthly basis. The study results clearly show that shipbreaking activities in Alang affect marine water quality and are a source of petrogenic hydrocarbon, associated with petroleum products, plasticizer, alkane and alkanolic acid.

Emerging Pollutants in the Marine Coastal Environment of the World's Largest Ship Breaking Yard- Alang, India

2023

DOZENS OF UK-LINKED VESSELS SCRAPPED ON SOUTH ASIAN BEACHES, DESPITE BAN

An Unearthed investigation has found that more than 40% of the vessels sent for recycling between 2018 to 2022 which were owned or run by UK-linked companies ended up in shipbreaking yards in South Asia. Unearthed found that 23 of the 33 UK-linked vessels that ended up in South Asian shipbreaking yards (70%) were reflagged to flag-of-convenience registries less than a year before being scrapped. All but five of them were reflagged to Saint Kitts and Nevis, Palau or Comoros. The UK-linked companies that saw the greatest number of their former vessels scrapped in South Asian yards during that period were the offshore oil services companies Valaris and Subsea7, and the shipping firm Swire and Sons.

Read the full article [here](#).

OUR REPORTS

NGO Shipbreaking Platform

“Trading Lives for Profit: How the Shipping Industry Circumvents Regulations to Scrap Toxic Ships on Bangladesh’s Beaches” - In collaboration with Human Rights Watch (2023)

Breaking Out: Anchoring Circular Innovation for ship recycling. (2022)

The Toxic Tide - Data and figures (2022)

Contradiction in terms: European Union must align its waste ship exports with international law and green deal (2020)

Study Report on Child Labour in the Shipbreaking Sector in Bangladesh (2019)

Behind the Hypocrisy of Better Beaches (2019)

Recycling Outlook. Decommissioning of North Sea Floating Oil & Gas Units. (2019)



To ensure that safe and clean ship recycling becomes the norm, and not the exception, the Platform will continue to inform policy makers, financial and corporate leaders, as well as researchers and journalists. With a broad base of support both in orientation and geographically, including membership in ship owning as well as shipbreaking countries, the Platform plays an important role in promoting solutions that encompass the respect of human rights, corporate responsibility and environmental justice.

WILL YOU JOIN US?

**IF YOU SHARE OUR VISION PLEASE MAKE A DONATION
TO SUPPORT OUR WORK OR CONTACT US TO FIND OUT
HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER!**

**SUPPORT
OUR WORK**



Since 2009, around 7751 ships were scrapped in South Asia, causing at least 449 deaths and 404 injuries. The figures on accidents are likely to be much higher. Occupational diseases are not even registered in these statistics and are difficult to monitor.

WE ARE NOW CALLING FOR YOUR SUPPORT TO HELP INJURED WORKERS AND ASBESTOS VICTIMS IN BANGLADESH. CHECK OUT OUR FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN FOR MORE INFORMATION BY CLICKING [HERE](#) OR ON THE IMAGE BELOW.

FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

HELP PROVIDING TREATMENT TO
INJURED WORKERS AND ASBESTOS VICTIMS
IN BANGLADESH



DONATE NOW



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Edited by:

Ingvild Jenssen, Nicola Mulinaris, Sara Costa, Benedetta Mantoan, Ekin Sakin

FIND US ONLINE

www.shipbreakingplatform.org

Twitter: @NGOShipbreaking

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WE THANK THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE LIFE PROGRAMME FOR THEIR SUPPORT.