

European Companies' Toxic Ship Breaking at the Cost of Bangladeshi Lives and the Environment

written by Ezba Walayat | October 1, 2023



In accordance to a report from Human Rights Watch (HRW), numerous European maritime corporations are allegedly sending their outdated and dangerous ships to be demolished. The “Trading Lives for Profit” study was released on September 28, 2023, in cooperation with the Shipbreaking Platform, a group of NGOs fighting to put an end to hazardous and unsustainable shipbreaking activities. European shipping firms have come under fire for leaving their old ships to be demolished in hazardous and dangerous ways on Bangladeshi beaches. As per the Human Rights Watch (HRW), it is said that the Sitakunda beaches of Bangladesh have developed into one of the largest shipbreaking yards in the world, offering cheap sources of steel for the nation’s construction industry.

Since 2020, 520 ships have been sent by shipping companies from Europe to the facility where thousands of workers disassemble ships without safety gear. According to HRW stated that “companies scrapping ships in Bangladesh’s hazardous and polluting yards are profiting at the expense of Bangladeshi lives and the environment.” Additionally, the report asserted that since 2019, at least 62 workers have died in accidents in Sitakunda’s shipbreaking yards, and many more have been hurt or become ill. According to the research, poisonous materials from the ships that are being broken up flow into the soil and water, severely harming the environment.



The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal forbids the shipment of hazardous waste from wealthy countries to developing countries. International law is broken when hazardous ship waste is dumped in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association (BSBA), which speaks for yard owners, reported that its members have taken action to improve safety in advance of a new international agreement on safe and environmentally sound scrapping, which is scheduled to go into effect in 2025. Mohammad Abu Taher, president of the BSBA said, "We are turning our shipbreaking yards into green yards even though it is expensive, we are working on it and to supply protective equipment to workers."

To conclude, the issue of toxic ship dumping in Bangladesh requires more attention and financial assistance from the international community. This would entail offering support to the Bangladeshi government so that it can enforce the rules and legislation and request that European companies cease ship dumping to protect human lives and the environment.