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ATTENTION: NEWS EDITORS

For immediate release

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Safer ship breaking could boost Bangladesh industry

People involved in ship breaking, from workers' representatives to shipyard owners, agreed that the industry, which makes a vital contribution to the national economy, needed support to improve safety and environmental standards. The consensus was voiced during a workshop organized by the United Nations in Dhaka earlier today.

"Ship recycling in its current state is under scrutiny," said Mr. Aage Bjorn Andersen, an international shipping expert who participated in the workshop. In recent years ship recycling in South Asia has come under a lot of criticism mainly because the public has become more aware of the difficult conditions workers experience, he said.

The huge task of dismantling ships is done manually in Bangladesh, with basic protection like helmets, gloves or goggles not provided to the workers. Each year many workers are injured, disabled or die. Despite the danger faced by them, their wages, hours of work and overtime payments, fail to meet minimum labour standards. Moreover, the improper disposal of harmful chemicals around ship-breaking yards is hazardous for the workers and a serious source of pollution in the surrounding environment.

Until now this industry has never been regulated and falls short of national and international standards.

However, it is an industry that Bangladesh can ill afford to lose. The nation has no domestic sources of iron ore and is faced with high prices for "new" steel in the international markets. Ship breaking produces 80 percent of the steel Bangladesh needs. The industry also provides an important source of revenue for the Government, and generates much-needed employment.

Vice President of the Bangladesh Ship Breakers Association, Mr. Yasin Ali said during the workshop that shipyard owners had already drawn up a number of recommendations for improving practices. However, until now, there had been little support for introducing change to this vital industry. Therefore, he welcomed the proposed activities to be undertaken by the Government's *Safe and Environment Friendly Ship Recycling project (SEFSR)*, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The three-year initiative is ultimately aimed at regulating ship breaking in Bangladesh. It seeks to achieve this by bringing together all concerned parties -- the relevant ministries, the Bangladesh Navy, importers, the Ship Breakers



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Association, survey companies, banks, traders, related industries, and workers. The workshop earlier today was the first activity under this project.

"I hope through this project we would be able to reach a consensus between the Government, employers and workers to strengthen the ship breaking industry, so that safer jobs and more jobs could be created," said Mr. Ashikul Alam Chowdhury of the National Coordination Committee of Workers Education.

Experts believe if the industry can meet agreed standards the nation could benefit greatly. Mr. Andersen explained that the International Maritime Organization is closely monitoring ship breaking practices in South Asia. "Bangladesh could attract an increasing number of vessels for disposal if the industry here demonstrates better environmental and occupational safety standards," he said.

The next activities under the project will include the establishment of an office in Chittagong, a national workshop to involve an even broader group of stakeholders, and some initial safety training for workers.

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Project details in brief: Safe and Environment-friendly Ship-Recycling

Start Date: November 2003

Estimated end date: June 2006

National Implementing Agency: Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments

Implementing Agencies: The International Labour Organization (ILO)

Executing Agency: Ministry of Labour and Employment

Budget: USD 1. 29 million

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