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**SHIPBREAKING GUIDELINES**  
**CHARTING NEW WATERS**

*Safety and health solutions provide important initiative*

BANGKOK (ILO News) – Amid growing global demand for shipbreaking operations in the region, ILO Guidelines on Safety and Health for the industry were today unanimously adopted by representatives of government, employers’ and workers’ organizations from heavyweight shipbreaking nations Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan and Turkey.

Worker safety has clearly not been a top priority at shipbreaking facilities in the region, and labourers seldom have access to basic safety items, such as hard hats, gloves and goggles for welding. Thousands are killed and millions injured amid often tortuous conditions.

Concerned environmental groups have regularly called for an improvement in shipbreaking standards across the board. The ILO’s efforts at improving labour conditions in shipbreaking operations therefore represent a practical and timely response.

“While there are still significant barriers to be overcome in terms of improving the lot of workers involved in this precarious and hazardous activity, these guidelines can provide an essential starting point on which to work toward a safer work environment for the shipbreaking industry,” said Nazrul Islam Khan, general-secretary, South Asian Regional Trade Union Council (SARTUC) and Bangladesh Metal Workers’ Union.

“These measures will build on other recent positive developments in the form of international instruments aimed at ensuring a less hazardous and more decent work environment for those employed in one of the world’s most dangerous occupations.”

The ILO worked to ensure the process of reviewing and adapting the guidelines was inclusive, involving senior officials from the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the Basel Convention (under the United Nations’ Environmental Programme [UNEP]), governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations, as well as resource experts from Canada, Norway, the Republic of Korea and the United States.

Paul Topping, representing Environment Canada said, “we [Canada] are committed to environmentally- and socially sustainable ship recycling. This requires consolidated international measures and Canada is working with the ILO, IMO and the secretariat of the Basel Convention to develop both international standards and practical projects”.

Topping stressed that a collaborative effort was essential, adding that current regulations are often bypassed by errant ship owners.

Developing countries often face a dilemma, since shipbreaking can create significant employment and revenue-generating opportunities on the one hand, while potentially creating environmental concerns and potential threats to decent work on the other.

A recent Reuters report, issued during the course of the meeting, refers to Pakistan, where the second-biggest ship ever built, the Sea Giant, is awaiting dismantling. Fishermen and international environmentalists are incensed and alarmed by what they say is an environmental concern, while employers insist the industry poses no threat to the beach, sea or workers.

“Workers in Gaddani [in Pakistan] lack basic medical facilities, union representation, their own residential areas, or clean drinking water. If they are injured, they can receive first aid nearby, but if it is serious they have to be taken to Karachi, some 40 kilometres away,” said Moosa Khan, Organizing Secretary of the Pakistan National Federation of Trade Unions. “Unfortunately, many seriously injured workers die on the journey to the city hospital.”

“These guidelines should ultimately help improve the working conditions for those employed in this hazardous occupation,” Khan said, adding that they would help governments in the region develop appropriate national policies.

Demand for shipbreaking services is likely to increase significantly in future years. The European Union (EU) recently approved a ban on single-hulled vessels, while the IMO has a phase-out programme in place. These ships will ultimately have to be disposed of, and dismantling may be the most practical, cost- and environmentally effective method.

Strong demand for shipbreaking will lead to an increase in employment in this hazardous work, so it was essential that guidelines be adopted and respected to ensure a safer working environment.

The next step will see the ILO carry out consultations with national authorities in countries concerned, including an assessment and auditing process, as well as identifying areas where technical assistance may be provided to aid implementation. The ILO, IMO and Basel Convention are dedicated to developing an integrated approach to regulation in this area.

For further information on the guidelines, please visit:

For further information on the meeting, or discuss possible interview opportunities, please contact:
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