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New Evidence Confirm Star Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Lines Deceived German Authorities to Dispose of the Toxic Laden SS Norway to India

Brussels; New Delhi; 30 June 2006: The NGO Platform on Shipbreaking, a global coalition of human rights and environmental groups working to uphold environmental justice, released a report today revealing new evidence that the third largest cruise operator in the world, Star Cruises Ltd and its subsidiary, Norwegian Cruise Lines, withheld vital information from German authorities, when they sought permission to allow their toxic waste laden vessel, the SS Norway, to depart from the Port of Bremerhaven on 25 May 2005 to Asia. The Report reveals that as early as December 2004, SCL and NCL formed the intent to dispose of the vessel, which they did not disclose to German authorities, and instead claimed that the SS Norway was going to Asia for repairs.

The Report entitled, “Star Cruises Ltd and Norwegian Cruise Lines: Deceiving Germany and Violating International Law in the Export of the SS Norway to India”, uncovered information disclosed in NCL’s 2005 Annual Report submitted to the United States Securities and Exchange Commission on 28 March 2006, explaining how NCL reduced the value of the SS Norway by as much as US$14.5 million in a span of months in 2004, diminishing the SS Norway to a scrap
value of US$12.3 million. The public disclosure further reveals that by December 2004, NCL’s management concluded that the sale of the SS Norway to a third party for re-use was not likely.

Citing confidential information from Pierre & Vacances, a French company, who in 2004 was able to requisition a study of the asbestos content of the vessel using the SS Norway’s ship plans and documents furnished by NCL, the Report confirms the presence of at least 1,200 tonnes of asbestos in the SS Norway. The confidential information also affirmed that at least EUR 17 million would be needed to partially decontaminate the asbestos in the vessel, more than the SS Norway’s scrap value. These facts, the Report asserts, puts into context the deception perpetrated by NCL and SCL in 2005.

“Lying to the German authorities in order to pass on tonnes of toxic wastes to unsuspecting workers in India or Bangladesh, and laying waste to the environment of South Asia is an indication of how morally bankrupt the people running Star Cruises are”, says Ingvild Jenssen, coordinator of the NGO Platform. “The management and the Board of Directors of these companies should be held criminally and civilly accountable by the German government for their actions.”

This is not the first time that NCL lied to government authorities to cover up an environmental crime. On July 31, 2002 the US Department of Justice issued a press release, entitled “Norwegian Cruise Line Admits to Environmental Crime”. In the release, the US DOJ stated that NCL “admitted that it engaged in a practice of systematically lying to the United States Coast Guard over a period of years regarding the discharge of oil-contaminated bilge waste from the SS Norway and at least one other ship.” NCL signed a plea agreement acknowledging the felony violation, paid US$1 million in criminal fines and cooperated with federal official to resolve the case.

The release of the findings of the NGO Platform was timed with their submission of a formal request to the Senator of Building, Environment and Transportation of Bremen, Mr. Neumeyer, demanding that Germany comply with its international obligations under the Basel Convention and its Basel Ban Amendment, which prohibits the export of hazardous wastes from developed nations to poorer countries, and immediately recall the SS Norway back to Germany to be decontaminated.

The European Commission also recently sent a letter to Germany asking for clarifications on whether the Basel Convention and Council Regulation no. 259/93 have been applied in the SS Norway case.

The SS Norway, the third largest cruise ship in the world after the Queen Elizabeth II and the ill-fated Titanic, was the jewel in the fleet of NCL until August of 2003, when an explosion in her boiler room killed 8 of her crew, injured 20 others, and left the vessel heavily damaged and without any propulsion. In March of 2004, NCL President, Mr. Colin Veitch publicly announced that the SS Norway would no longer ply the North American cruise market, precipitating the cat and mouse game that NCL and SCL played with various government authorities.

The NGO Platform raised concerns that the asbestos load of the SS Norway is only a portion of the problem it presents. Older vessels are known to contain the persistent organic pollutant, polychlorinated biphenyls or PCBs, which are known to bioaccumulate in the food chain and poison top predators such as humans. PCBs are also known probable human carcinogens and are slated for globally phase out under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.
“The dangers posed by the SS Norway and similar vessels are real. The level of asbestos in the SS Norway is more than double of the French aircraft carrier Clemenceau, and we still have no idea how much PCBs, lead, cadmium, mercury and the other toxins are in the SS Norway,” says Gopal Krishna of Ban Asbestos Network India. “There is a great injustice before us, and the global community must act quickly and in unison to stop it.”

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