Press Release
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For immediate release

Toxic cruise ship SS Norway denied entry by India after activist warning – More Asbestos than Clemenceau

Brussels, Delhi, 12 May 2006: Following a petition filed by Ban Asbestos Network India (BANI), a member of the global NGO Platform on Shipbreaking, the Indian Supreme Court has temporarily denied entry of the toxic cruise liner SS Norway (aka SS Blue Lady, SS France) into Indian territorial waters pending a review by the newly established Indian Technical Committee on Ship Recycling, initially formed to deal with the French ex-aircraft carrier Clemenceau. Their final decision is expected by July 2006.

The massive ocean liner SS Norway is thought to contain between 1,200 and 1,300 tons of asbestos contaminated material - far more than the Clemenceau - and significant quantities of toxic PCB-contaminated material as well. In February of this year, Bangladesh denied entry of the ship to their breaking yards, yet last Friday (May 5) it left Port Klang, Malaysia and was being tugged toward the infamous scrapping beaches of Alang on the Gujarat coast of India, allegedly sold to an Indian Shipbreakers Consortium, Regent Shipping. It is not known where the ship will now go pending the resolution of this latest scandal.

“It’s getting to be a ship scandal a day, but the real scandal is that governments around the world and the shipping industry refuse to acknowledge that it is no longer acceptable to continue to dump toxic waste ships on some of the poorest, most exploited workers and communities in the world,” said Gopal Krishna of BANI.
Instead of reacting to one ship at a time, the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking is calling on all countries concerned to adopt a blanket policy consistent with that of the United Nations’ Basel Convention’s requirements to decontaminate in developed countries prior to export to breaking yards in developing countries. And in the case of a historically significant vessel like the SS Norway, all avenues to restore and re-use the vessel should be pursued first prior to even considering recycling.

In the case of the SS Norway, the countries that should have taken responsibility for the ship include Germany and Malaysia because last year the cruise liner was allowed to be illegally exported from Bremerhaven, Germany. And just days ago, the vessel left Malaysian waters for India without filing the necessary hazardous waste export notifications required under the Basel Convention.

Import of asbestos waste is also banned in India as per Hazardous Waste (Management and Handling) Amendment Rules, 2003. And in accordance with an earlier Supreme Court order, decontamination of a ship is a pre-condition for any ship to enter India. Greenpeace India, member of the NGO Platform, called upon the Indian government to act in line with other countries such as Bangladesh and France, as well as follow recent announcements of the European Commission.

“By refusing this vessel, following the Clemenceau debacle, we believe the Indian Supreme Court is sending a clear signal to Europe and the rest of the OECD countries, that a universal policy be adopted -- ships must be decontaminated prior to export for breaking,” said Ingvild Jenssen, Coordinator of the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking in Brussels. “We can only hope that their arms won’t be twisted in the next weeks by very powerful shipping interests hoping to maintain their immoral but profitable practices.”

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