Labour and environment governance at shipbreaking sector in Bangladesh underlined in a workshop where reality, challenges and way-forward discussed

In a workshop held in Chittagong on March 30, 2023, speakers demanded occupational safety, environmental protection, clean and decent ship recycling, right to organize, sound industrial relation, effective application of state and international law and regulations including effective inspection system, formation of safety committee, strengthening trade union activities with social dialogue, bargaining and negotiation, and ensuring social security of workers working in ship breaking yard in Chittagong. In the event, it was informed that 73 workers have died in the ship breaking industry in Chittagong in the last 5 years, which is an indication of insecurity in the workplace.

The workshop was jointly organized by Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation and Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association. Representatives of various government agencies, trade unions, owners’ associations and representatives of civil society participated in the workshop held at St. Martin's Hotel in Chattogram city.

Two presentations have been made on the aspect of labour and environment governance at shipbreaking sector in Bangladesh. Muhammad Asadullah Al Ghalib, Lawyer at Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) made a presentation on environmental governance at shipbreaking sector: reality, challenges and way forward. In his presentation he focused on effect of ship recycling at the environment, toxic waste which includes Asbestos, PCBs (mainly cables), ODS (mainly polyurethane foam), paints (metals, tributyltin (TBT) and PCBs, heavy metals, waste liquid organic, miscellaneous (mainly sewage), waste liquids inorganic (acids), reusable liquids organics, international legal regime and state Laws/Rules. BELA informed that by implementing the laws applicable to the ship breaking industry and strengthening the inspection in this regard, a decent work environment can be created in this industry. In addition, importance is imposed on the implementation of court orders for this industry.
Md. Alam Hossain, Director of OSHE Foundation made another presentation on labour governance at shipbreaking sector: reality, challenges and way forward highlighting the labour issues i.e. economical importance of ship recycling industry, Nature of employment and livelihood of shipbreaking workers, workers’ rights context/circumstances, health and safety risk and accident information, various labour related regulations in Labour Act 2006, responsible Government authorities for implementing labor governance and their functions, the success and challenges of inspection system at ship breaking sector and recommendations for way-forward. The OSHE Foundation demanded for formation of safety committee and strengthening social dialogue and inspection system in ship breaking yards and special social security program for workers as per labor law.

A total of 30 participants participated for Department of Labour, Department of Environment, Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishment, academia, elected LGI representatives (UP Chairman), different NGO and trade union representatives participated in the workshop. The workshop was conducted by Dr. SM Morshed, Vice Chairperson of OSHE Foundation.