

Bangladesh

# Medical services and health and safety training for shipbreaking workers



Unifor  
Social  
Justice  
Fund

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The Social Justice Fund is committed to working with unions and other worker-led organizations around the world to improve people's lives at work.

It is estimated that more than 100,000 people globally are employed in the shipbreaking sector, mostly in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, China and Turkey. Once highly mechanized, today shipbreaking is very dangerous and grueling work. Workers dismantle the giant sea vessels, so the steel can be re-sold and re-purposed. In Bangladesh, large shipbreaking yards line the coast of the Bay of Bengal.

# THE OSHE Clinic

In Bangladesh, where health and safety and environmental regulations are lax and it is difficult to find paid employment, workers, including children, are frequently badly injured or killed on the job.

Workers lack adequate health and safety protections and can be exposed to toxic substances, which are also released into the water from the shoreline.

# 4

clinic staff members

The Unifor Social Justice Fund has partnered with the Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) to help set up a medical clinic in the city of Sitakunda in the Chittagong district in an effort to help provide much-needed medical services to injured workers.

# 1,250+

clinic patients in 2 years

**The OSHE/Unifor Workers Health Clinic** provides basic medical health services, physiotherapy support and knowledge about occupational health and safety rights at work.

# 30-40

workers and their families per day

The clinic runs study circles where workers can learn about basic occupational health and safety rights, as well as how to apply existing labour laws. These classes teach workers their rights, how to enforce them, and how to encourage others to do the same. With the necessary tools of education and health and safety protections, workers are empowering themselves in the sector.

In two years, the clinic received more than 1,250 patients, and up to 30 to 40 workers and their families a day. The clinic provided services including but not limited to basic health care, special physical therapy, pain relief and referral to specialists. There are four people working at the clinic: a doctor, a nurse, a part time accountant and executive director.

OSHE regularly hosts special health care seminars for union leaders and members and provides basic information about disease prevention in the workplace. The Foundation also raises awareness by providing educational materials about health and safety at work. In addition, OSHE supports and assists the families of deceased members.



**Nezam Uddin, 34**

*Injured two years ago in an accident at work when a heavy iron plate fell on him from atop a ship. Nezam has been off work since then and has six dependents at home. The shipyard owner only paid for the immediate emergency medical support, while refusing to pay any compensation and much-needed long term medical assistance. Thanks to medical support at the clinic, Nezam is no longer laid up in bed. The clinic is playing an important role in Nezam's recovery.*

**“Medical support from the clinic was really helpful during this time of crisis. Now I feel more confident than I was before – the clinic helped me to get connected with the leaders of the shipbreaking workers union and now I’ve become a member of that union, and hope to get back to work again.”**



**Rajibul Islam, 35**

*In 2013, he badly burnt his right hand while cutting metal on a scrapped ship, inside the shipyard. The yard management did not provide any personal protective equipment for the job. After the accident, the shipyard management sent Rajibul to a local hospital and refused to provide any follow up treatment. He found out about the clinic from a friend and was able to access medical treatment and joined the study circle on health and safety and also learned about labour rights.*

**“The medical support and services I received from the OSHE’s Workers Health Clinic for shipbreaking workers were very much timely and helped me to recover from my burn injury and build new hope for the future. Now I am more aware about health and safety issues and my basic rights at work. I have been asking my fellow colleagues to demand for safer workplaces at shipbreaking sites and the necessity of using protective equipment at work.”**