

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, BELA

Syeda Rizwana Hasan is a lawyer and environmentalist from Bangladesh. She focuses particularly on regulations for the shipbreaking industry in Bangladesh and was awarded with the Goldman Environmental Prize for her work in 2009. She grew up in a politically engaged family. She joined the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association at the age of 24 after completing her Master's degree in law. As a result, she soon became one of the country's leading voices in the field of environment. Today, Hasan heads six offices with nearly 60 staff and is one of the leading young women lawyers enrolled in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.



Positions and work

She is now the executive director of the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), a public interest law firm. BELA is a member of the International Network on Climate Change. In line with her focus on the ship breaking industry in Bangladesh, she served on the board of the "NGO forum on ship breaking". Hasan recognised the significant environmental and labour rights violations in the shipbreaking industry and began her advocacy on behalf of workers in that industry. In 2003, she filed a petition in the Supreme Court seeking an order to prevent ageing ships from entering Bangladesh unless they were certified free of toxic substances. She also asked for a ban on scrapping activities unless the relevant government authorities enacted and enforced standards to protect the environment and workers. As a result, Hasan initiated litigation against the importation of vessels that Greenpeace deemed hazardous. In the course of the litigation, the Bangladesh Supreme Court found that the government should make rules to prevent dangerous ships from entering Bangladesh. The court also ordered an accused shipbreaking company to pay compensation. For the first time in Bangladesh's judicial history, a polluter was fined. Following the cases handled by Syeda Rizwana Hasan, the government has started to formulate binding rules to regulate the shipbreaking industry. She is also a member of various committees and NGOs such as the "Committee on Legal protection of the disabled of the national forum of organisations" or the "South Asian network for development and environmental economics" (SANDEE).

Awards

In addition to being awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize, Syeda Rizwana Hasan received the Ramon Magsaysay Prize in 2012 for her "uncompromising courage and passionate leadership in a campaign of legal activism in Bangladesh that affirms people's right to a good environment as nothing less than their right to dignity and life".

Exercise 7: Talk Global

Additional info for your short presentation

1. introduction of her in connection with the Goldman Environmental Prize:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtKAa8PPvYQ>
2. her speech at the Goldman Environmental Prize Ceremony 2009:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rXF-iN9wj8>

Further information for those interested

Ted Talk by Syeda Rizwana Hasan on environmental justice in Bangladesh:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2W9BrZgsMK8>

Source

<http://www.northsouth.edu/faculty-members/shss/law/syeda-rizwana-hasan.html>
<https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/rizwana-hasan/>
<https://www.shutterstock.com/>