

# GLOBAL ASBESTOS ACTION ALLIANCE

## MEDIA BRIEFING KIT

Rotterdam Convention COP 8

24th April to 5th May 2017

Geneva Switzerland

Union Aid Abroad APHEDA  
The global justice organisation of the Australian union movement



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# ROTTERDAM REFORM 2017 SMASHING THE DEADLOCK

*A better way to protect people from hazardous chemicals*

Nations participating in the 2017 Conference of Parties have a powerful opportunity to protect some of the world's most vulnerable citizens by voting to make Rotterdam Convention decision-making more democratic when a consensus decision is not possible.

An amendment before the 2017 Conference of Parties will make the Rotterdam Convention a more effective instrument to protect the world from the trade in harmful chemicals.

The current voting mechanism for listing chemicals is compromised. The listing of well-known harmful chemicals is blocked by fewer than 5% of all countries that are parties to the Convention.

Repeatedly over the last decade, countries with a vested interest have been able to veto listings of dangerous chemicals, such as chrysotile asbestos and paraquat.

These countries are often protecting their own industries from having to receive prior consent of importing countries before they export their hazardous material. They are also known to pressure and intimidate smaller, poorer countries into supporting their industries, using fake science and increasingly aggressive tactics.

The result is that certain chemicals that have repeatedly met independent, evidence-based requirements for listing under the convention **remain unlisted today.**

Without voting reform in 2017, it is highly unlikely that their listing will get through future Conference of Parties.

The global market in deadly chemicals like chrysotile asbestos and paraquat has thrived in this time, propped up by exports to sometimes unwitting nations that would be

subject to more stringent consent restrictions if the safeguards of the Rotterdam Convention were in place.

In 2017 a group of African countries is putting forward an amendment that still seeks consensus of all countries if at all possible, but where this is not possible provides a mechanism to break the veto power of a small handful of countries that would seem to have greater interest in short term profit than protecting human health and the environment.

Such reform would bring the Rotterdam Convention in line with other UN treaties such as the Stockholm and Basel Conventions.

## **Summary: Breaking the voting deadlock of the Rotterdam Convention will:**

- restore democracy by removing the veto power of the minority who act in scandalous self-interest to block listing which currently requires 100% approval of all countries that ratify the Convention
- address global inequality by equipping poorer nations to identify imports of dangerous chemicals.
- protect some of the most vulnerable citizens in the world
- make the whole UN chemical treaty program work better by having all of the Conventions in synergy
- restore the integrity of the Rotterdam Convention by breaking the decade long deadlock on certain chemical listings

# ROTTERDAM CONVENTION EXPLAINER

The Rotterdam Convention is a binding multilateral treaty to protect global human health and the environment through restrictions on the international trade in hazardous chemicals and pesticides.

The Convention imposes an obligation on countries exporting hazardous substances and it provides the basic human right of Prior Informed Consent to countries in the global South, empowering them to control how and if hazardous substances can be shipped into their countries so they can better protect their population and environment.

The Rotterdam Convention came into force in 2004.

Currently 157 countries have ratified the Rotterdam Convention. Members meet every 2 years and the next meeting is early May 2017.

Annex III of the Convention is a list of chemicals that are subject to this Prior Informed Consent Procedure.

It is not a ban, but it means that countries exporting a listed substance must seek the consent of the destination country before export.

There are a total of 48 chemicals listed in Annex III, including 34 pesticides and 14 industrial chemicals.

Prior to consideration for listing by Parties, a substance must have the recommendation of the Chemical Review Committee of the Rotterdam Convention and be banned or severely restricted by countries in at least 2 regions of the world.

This Committee is made up of 32 independent expert scientists from around the world who review the scientific evidence for and against a substance. This means that before a recommended for listing on Annex III is made, impartial experts have already found the chemical to be a health risk.

Article 22 of the Rotterdam Convention requires total consensus in order to list chemicals on Annex III. This has enabled a minority of countries to repeatedly block the listing of known hazardous chemicals.

Rotterdam is one of three treaties dealing with hazardous chemicals and pesticides. The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants and the Basel Convention on the disposal of hazardous waste hold Conferences in tandem with the Rotterdam Convention.

# THE AFRICAN AMENDMENT

The listings of several known harmful substances to Annex III have stalled despite the recommendations of an impartial panel of experts, the Chemical Review Committee.

The Conference of the Parties repeatedly deals with the same chemicals.

This year, half of the eight chemicals that will be considered for listing were blocked two years ago.

Paraquat Dichloride will be discussed for the 6th year this year. Chrysotile asbestos has been listed for the past 10 years.

In that time, global markets in these dangerous substances have flourished. Frustration at this situation has peaked.

At the 2017 Conference, a group of 12 African countries will put forward a proposal to reform Article 22. These countries are: Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia.

The proposal from the African Region group is that if all attempts at consensus fail, a three-quarter majority vote be allowed.

This would align the standard of amending annexes to list chemicals in Rotterdam Convention with that of the Basel and Stockholm Conventions, and international treaties more broadly.

CONVENTION	ANNEX LISTING CHEMICALS	DECISION-MAKING MECHANISM FOR LISTING
<b>Stockholm Convention</b> on Persistent Organic Pollutants	Annex A- Elimination Annex B- restriction Annex C- Unintentional production	Every effort at reaching consensus should be made. Failing that, as a last resort, amendments to the Annexes are adopted by a three-fourths majority.
<b>Basel Convention</b> on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal	Annex I - categories of wastes to be controlled Annex VIII - wastes characterised as hazardous	Every effort at reaching consensus should be made. Failing that, as a last resort, amendments to the Annexes are adopted by a three-fourths majority.
<b>Rotterdam Convention</b> on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade	Annex III - Chemicals subject to the Prior Informed Consent Procedure	Amendments can be made by complete consensus (100%) only.

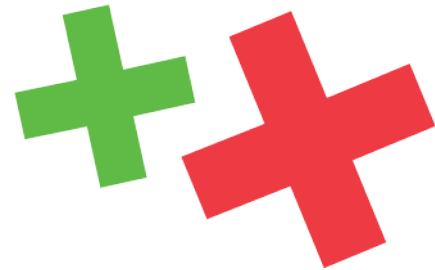
# BLOCKING NATIONS AND VESTED INTERESTS

The blocking of listings of known hazardous chemicals at past Conferences of Parties commonly occurs by countries that have considerable conflicts of interest.

At the 2015 COP, chrysotile asbestos was blocked by **Russia, Kazakhstan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Cuba, Zimbabwe**. Asbestos is consumed by all of these countries and produced by **Russia, Kazakhstan and Zimbabwe**.

At the same Conference, paraquat was blocked by **Indonesia, India, and Guatemala**

In 2013, chrysotile asbestos was blocked by **Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe**.



## THE TOP FIVE ASBESTOS CONSUMING COUNTRIES (BY ORDER):\*

1. China
2. India
3. Russia
4. Brazil
5. Indonesia

## THE TOP FOUR ASBESTOS PRODUCING COUNTRIES:\* (2013)

1. Russia: 1050000 metric tonnes
2. China: 420000 metric tonnes
3. Kazakhstan: 175,000 metric tonnes
4. Brazil: 307000 metric tonnes

\*source: USGS (United States Geological Survey)

# THE IMPACT ON DEVELOPING NATIONS

Failure to list dangerous chemicals on Annex III profoundly affects some of the world's most vulnerable people.

As developed countries have become aware of the harm caused by deadly chemicals and have moved toward bans or restrictions on asbestos and paraquat, global chemical industries have looked for new markets in less developed countries.

The table below shows Asia's asbestos use (in yellow) increasing rapidly to 72% of the world's total since 2000, as the rest of the world's declined as a result of bans and reduced use by most countries.

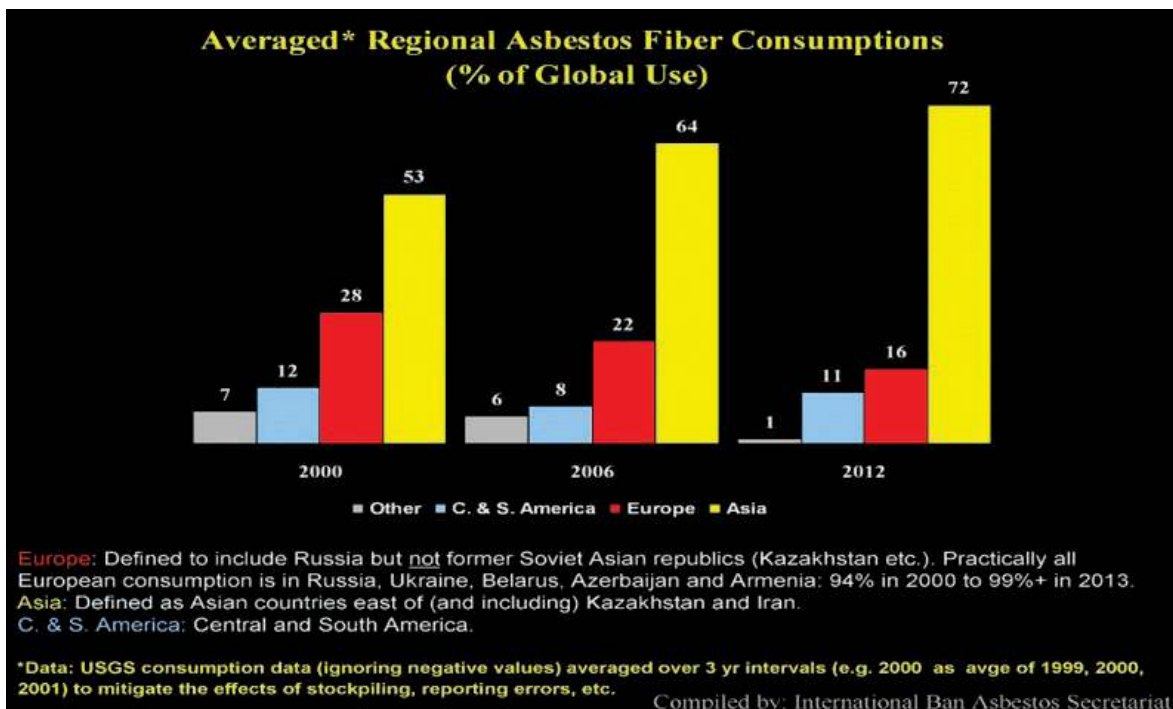
Developing nations often have fewer resources to devote to education, awareness raising, regulation and detection. Countries

with cheap and abundant sources of labour and weak worker protection regimes are ideal places for asbestos manufacturers to set up factories.

There is low awareness to harmful effects of asbestos exposure not only among the general population in many developing countries, but also among policy makers.

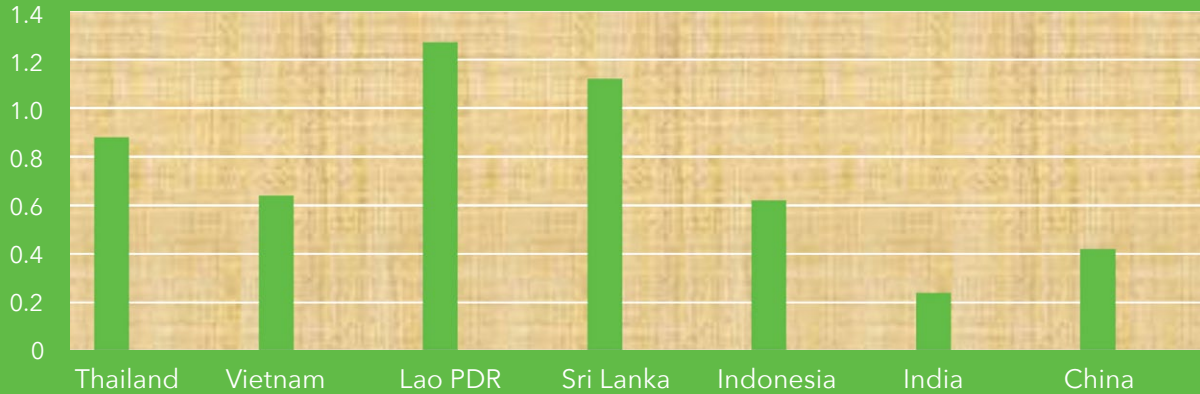
Because developing economies are more vulnerable to the international trade in harmful chemicals, they are subsequently more reliant on the information, protections and safeguards put in place by the Rotterdam Convention.

So when the safeguards are voted down, developing nations are disproportionately impacted.



# THE IMPACT ON DEVELOPING NATIONS

CHRYSTOLE ASBESTOS CONSUMPTION PER HEAD OF POPULATION  
SELECTED COUNTRIES ASIA 2013 (BASED ON USGS DATA 2013)



## ASBESTOS AND ASIA

The focus market in the last 2 decades of asbestos mining companies such as those in Russia, Kazakhstan and Brazil has been Asia, as other regions rapidly ban or reduce consumption as asbestos related diseases mount, costs of compensation to victims, health care and safe removal and storage of waste become apparent.

These companies are aggressively marketing in Asia with over 90% of global imports of asbestos in 2015 in just 10 Asian countries. (India, Indonesia, China, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines).

Aging technology, poor safety standards, low awareness of exposure risks and rapid turnover of workers in some of these countries means very high exposure rates for workers and communities living around manufacturing locations and high rates of asbestos related diseases in coming decades.

Within South East Asia there is also trends of some higher GDP economies reducing imports considerably (e.g. Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines) while the industry is pushed into

still developing economies such as Lao PDR and Cambodia.

## PARAQUAT AND BURKINA FASO

Paraquat is described as the most toxic herbicide to be marketed in the last 60 years.

At the 2015 Conference of Parties, the listing of Paraquat on Annex III was proposed by the small nation of Burkina Faso.

Speaking after the listing was blocked by Indonesia, India and Guatemala, Burkina Faso's Director General of The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development said:

*"Burkina Faso is a developing country and information sharing is crucial for us. Paraquat has caused, and continues to cause, many severe health effects and deaths amongst agricultural workers in a number of countries. But aggressive lobbying by the pesticide industry, particularly the Swiss company Syngenta, has resulted in many countries finding themselves unable to ban it."*



# ASBESTOS

## THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE VS PROPAGANDA AND FAKE NEWS

There is overwhelming global scientific consensus that asbestos causes cancer.

Countless studies confirm that asbestos exposure increases the risk of lung cancer and mesothelioma.

The World Health Organisation is adamant that there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos.

WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer has evaluated human exposure to asbestos on four occasions - in 1973, 1977, 1987, and 2012<sup>1</sup>.

These repeated scientific evaluations confirm that all types of asbestos cause's mesothelioma and cancers of the lung, larynx and ovary.

The use of asbestos is banned in 59 countries and will be 60 when Canada's announced ban comes into effect in 2018.

Asbestos is classified as a known human carcinogen by the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

The global asbestos industry generates self-funded studies that are widely discredited as counterfeit science, published in fake scientific journals and not peer reviewed by independent scientists.

Every scientific organisation that has examined the asbestos issue - including The Union for the International Control of Cancer (2012), comprising more than 700 member organisations in 155 countries, the World Federation of Public Health Associations (2005), the International Commission on Occupational Health (2000), the International Social Security Association (2004), the Collegium Ramazzini (1999, 2010) and the International Trade Union Confederation (2004) - have all dismissed the claims of the chrysotile asbestos industry as having no credibility.

However, in recent years, fake scientific news has proliferated with the growth of "predatory publishers" rising from 18 in 2011, to nearly 700 in 2015<sup>2</sup>.

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1. WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer, "Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risks to Humans" Volume 100 <http://monographs.iarc.fr/ENG/Monographs/vol100C/mono100C.pdf>

2. "Firm action needed on predatory journals", British Medical Journal, 16 January 2015

## CASE STUDY

# GLOBAL ASBESTOS INDUSTRY: A HISTORY OF INTIMIDATION, THREATS, AND CORRUPTION

For two decades since the movement toward international bans, global anti-asbestos activists, trade union officials, health professionals and scientists have been subjected to spying, threats, bribery, intimidation and more.

Almost everyone who has spoken out about the harm of asbestos can tell a story of the aggressive and often criminal tactics of the global pro-asbestos lobby.

- The infiltration of the global anti-asbestos movement by a Kazakhstani backed UK corporate spy, Robert Moore, detailed in this report: <https://newmatilda.com/2017/03/05/lethal-lies-how-a-corporate-spy-for-a-kazakhstan-company-infiltrated-the-global-anti-asbestos-network/>
- Lawsuits against campaigners in Brazil, India, the UK and France;
- Legal threats to a trade union campaigner in Switzerland and authors of publications critical of the industry in the UK and Italy as well as ban asbestos campaigners in Vietnam.
- Decision makers at international agencies and civil servants have been targeted and/or threatened by industry bullies and ban asbestos
- Anti asbestos campaigners have been denounced by speakers representing Russian asbestos interests at public meetings in Korea and Switzerland and

maligned via the internet.

- Corrupted the scientific process by commissioning research to “prove” that “chrysotile asbestos can be used safely”.
- Spend large amounts of funds on lobbying and study tours to Brazil and Russia for key national leaders from importing countries



**“THERE IS AGGRESSIVE  
INDUSTRY PROPAGANDA  
ON THE ‘SAFE USE THEORY’  
IN ASBESTOS CONSUMING  
COUNTRIES THROUGH HIGH END  
CONFERENCES – INDONESIA,  
PHILIPPINES AND INDIA.  
WHEREVER THE INDUSTRY SMELLS  
AN ASBESTOS BAN, THEY TRY TO  
REACH OUT TO BRAIN-WASH WITH  
THEIR BUNDLE OF LIES”**

Apolinar Tolentino, Regional Representative, Asia Pacific, Building and Wood Workers International (Philippines)

# PERSONAL STORIES OF ASBESTOS HARM



## INDONESIA

*This has been edited from a letter that was read by Siti Kristina in 2013 in Korea*

My name is Siti Kristina, I'm 47 years old, and I am a former worker of PT. Trigraha, Cibinong Indonesia. PT. Trigraha is an asbestos textile factory. We produce asbestos thread, a material for asbestos cloth. We process the raw material of asbestos dust, mix it with cotton and polyester and spin it to make the asbestos thread. We use dry process.

I had been working for this factory since March 1991. In 2013, I was no longer a permanent worker since the companies reduced its asbestos production and expanded its business unit of aluminum material production. Most of the permanent workers, particularly women had to take early retirement. But then, the company offered us to work again as a contractual worker. On March this year, I finally gained my freedom from asbestos dust. I decided to quit my job and retired. So I totally work for 23 years with asbestos company.

I worked for Trigraha since its first year operation. So I really know the condition inside the factory.

I had never had any serious health problem until 2009. I started coughing. At the first time, I thought it was just ordinary coughing. I went to hospital almost every three months for a medical examination because of the coughing and fever I had. I felt better a while but then in the next three month, I got sick again. I lost my weight too. I did a medical examination provided by the clinic inside the factory. But I was not satisfied with its result. So I went to a hospital. The doctor was shocked learning my health condition. The doctor said my lung was rough and she asked if I worked in a dusty environment. She gave me some medicines for my lung. For a few months, the coughing was gone but it started again after a while.

Then in 2010, for the first time I met Yeyong. He was with a staff from the OHS organization. The staff asked Pak Nana, Bu Dewi, Bu Yusni and Bu Atun to take a medical examination in Cipto Mangunkusumo Hospital (RSCM). We got a thorough examination there, including CT scan.

Because I was still coughing and went to the clinic every three months, when the doctors said that I was okay, I could not believe them. I was still losing my weight, still coughing and had a sore throat. In 2012, I met another staff from the OHS organization who informed me about the medical result from Korea. He said that the doctors from Korea had diagnosed me with an early symptom of asbestosis.

It was shocking for me. My friend who got the same result also experienced the same. Off course our families were worried too. We got stressed thinking about our health

# PERSONAL STORIES OF ASBESTOS HARM

situation and our future, whether we can be cured or not.

I was on medications for six months, consuming medicines everyday, once in two weeks I had to buy the medicines and once a month I had to go for a routine health check-up. It was exhausting.

After six months, I felt better, did not experience difficulties to breath anymore and the coughing also stopped.

We used masks at the workplace, simple sanitary masks, which were replaced once a week. We had to double even triple the mask and put handkerchief as an additional layer to ensure our mouth covered. Back then, the company gave a better one but not anymore. The OHS management was also poor. We were never encouraged to wear a mask or to follow the OHS regulation.

Asbestos goods production is being reduced now. I hope the company has more concern on the welfare of its workers. And I hope the Government thinks more about the condition of workers who work at a dangerous workplace. I really want to be healthy. I wish there will be more communities such as Ban Asbestos across the world who support us. Because, we cannot fight this war alone.



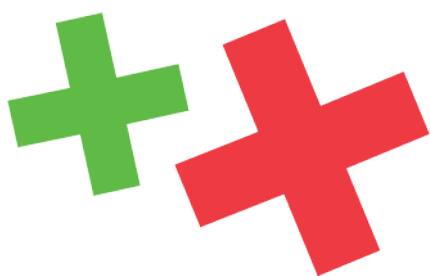
## INDIA

I am Rajendra Pevekar and I suffer from an asbestos-related disease. I will be bringing the voice of victims of asbestos-related diseases to the global meeting of governments in May 2017.

My father worked in an asbestos company in Mumbai. Through my father's work, my mother and I were both exposed to asbestos fibers and both suffer from asbestos-related disease as a result of secondary exposure.

When my father worked he used to be covered in fibres. I am the youngest son so he used to hold me close to his chest lovingly and lift me up. I used to start coughing and Papa would say: 'It's dust. Of course, if it goes up your nose you will cough'. The authorities never told us anything. Naturally, I am angry with them. After a few years we started to figure it out on our own. Asbestos is harmful. It causes cancer.

I face a difficult choice - treating my mother or myself. I have chosen to treat my mother as she has a shorter life and needs treatment first.



# ORGANISATIONS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

## INTERNATIONAL

- ITUC International Trade Union Confederation
- Building Workers International (BWI) Global Trade Union
- IndustriALL Global Trade Union
- International Ban Asbestos Secretariat - IBAS

## EUROPE

- European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
- Solidar Switzerland
- Trades Union Congress (UK)
- Unite the Union (UK)
- Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras - CCOO (Spain)

## ASIA PACIFIC

- Australian Council of Trade Unions
- Union Aid Abroad APHEDA (Australia)
- The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (Australia)
- Asia Ban Asbestos Network - ABAN
- Occupational & Environmental Health Network of India (OEHNI)
- Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC)
- Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims (ANROEV)
- New Zealand Council of Trade Unions
- Local Initiative for OHS Network - LION Indonesia
- Vietnam Ban Asbestos Network - VN BAN

## USA

- American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations AFL-CIO
- Asbestos Disease Awareness Organisation - ADAO

## CANADA

- Right On Canada
- Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)
- Union for Canada (Unifor)

# CONTACTS FOR INTERVIEW AND FOLLOW UP DURING RC COP 8

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# MEDIA RELEASE

Sunday 23 April 2017

## GLOBAL ASBESTOS ACTION ALLIANCE CONFRONTS GLOBAL ASBESTOS INDUSTRY **GOOD CoP/ BAD CoP?**

*Geneva 24th April 2017*

For more than a decade the asbestos industry has blocked the wishes of the rest of the world and refused to allow chrysotile asbestos to be put on the Rotterdam Convention's list of hazardous substances. This must be stopped at COP 8.

The Global Asbestos Action Alliance will renew its push this week to have white asbestos listed as a global banned substance as the 8th Conference of the Rotterdam Convention kicks off in Geneva.

Rotterdam is one of three Conventions in the "triple CoP" which also features the Basel and Stockholm Conventions, regulating international trade in chemical and "other substances" including asbestos.

Despite it meeting all requirements for listing by an independent expert panel for more than 10 years, chrysotile or white asbestos, a known killer, has still not been listed under the Convention. A rump of countries, led by Russia, which still mines and manufactures chrysotile products, simply refuse to allow it to be listed.

Under current rules, a single country can stand in the way of an item being listed as a "toxic substance or known carcinogen". Advocates for the listing believe that the archaic voting procedures mean that millions of people will continue to be unnecessarily exposed to the deadly substance.

### **The 10 year blocking of the listing of chrysotile must end**

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said "Asbestos, including chrysotile, is one of the biggest industrial killers of all time. Tens of thousands of people die from it each year, and it is scandalous that more than a hundred million people are still exposed to chrysotile asbestos. Getting it on the Rotterdam list is an important step towards protecting those, especially in developing countries, who are increasingly being exposed to it."

"How many more people will have to die because of Russia's refusal?" Michael Borowick, Asst Secretary of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, and observer to CoP 8, asked.

"Australia banned asbestos in all its forms in 2003. It's time that at the very least, we controlled its transport and storage internationally."

Andrew Dettmer, National President of the AMWU and an observer to CoP 8, attended CoP7 as an observer in 2015, said, "The Convention itself is dysfunctional. Because one nation can effectively mount a veto, this leads to perverse outcomes."

"It isn't very different to Alice in Wonderland at times. At CoP 7, the biocide Fenthion, a proven

killer, was considered for listing. But because Sudan wanted to keep using it - under pressure from the chemical industry - they vetoed its listing with their one vote. It's perverse" he said.

Susan Murray, National Health and Safety Adviser to Unite the Union (UK) also attended CoP 7. "The Convention needs changing. The proposal from the 12 African Nations to require a 75% vote to list a substance would simply bring Rotterdam into line with the other two Conventions."

Phil Hazelton, representative of Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA and Observer to CoP 8, said that it was heartening that a number of countries were strengthening their support for the listing of chrysotile and not being tricked by the asbestos industry sales job. "Asia is the big push for new sales by the asbestos industry as more countries in other regions ban it. Thanks to an increased awareness of the health impacts of the use of chrysotile they are looking at the economic and human costs of its use, and the availability of so many safe alternative products, and more and more deciding the long term cost of chrysotile is too much."

Esther Lynch, Confederal Secretary of the ETUC, said that it was important for the EU to take leadership. "Twelve African nations have stuck their necks out and said that the Convention isn't good enough. We agree. The EU took a strong position at CoP7, stating that the failure to list Chrysotile risked reducing Rotterdam to a farce. It's time for the EU to band together and bring the voting arrangements for Rotterdam into alignment with the other Conventions."

Linda Reinstein, Mesothelioma widow and ADAO cofounder, simply stated, "Asbestos facts are irrefutable - asbestos kills. Enough."

ENDS

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**The Global Asbestos Action Alliance is supported by:**

International Trade Union Confederation, European Trade Union Confederation, Australian Council of Trade Unions, New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, Trades Union Congress, Canadian Labor Congress, AFL-CIO, IndustriALL Global Union, BWI Global Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, CFMEU, Unifor, Unite the Union, CCOO (Spain), Associated Labor Union (Philippines), ADAO, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA, Asia Monitor Resource Centre

**The following will be available for comment during the Conference:**

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