



15 December 2017

Stop the coming cancer epidemic in Asia

Global call for action to scientists, doctors, researchers and groups affected by asbestos

An influential group of scientists and researchers today launched a global campaign to counter the misinformation from the asbestos industry, particularly in Asia, about the cancer causing product.

Latest estimates by respected global epidemiological study Global Burden of Disease (GBD), conducted by the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation suggest more than 222,000 people died globally in 2016 from asbestos related diseases such as lung cancer, mesothelioma, laryngeal and ovarian cancer as well as asbestosis. The GBD study is the most comprehensive worldwide observational epidemiological study ever conducted.

The launch of the global campaign today is supported by events occurring simultaneously in Indonesia, Vietnam and India. All three countries are major continuing users of chrysotile asbestos and countries where GBD estimates more than 10,000 combined deaths occurred in 2016.

The Asia Ban Asbestos Network (ABAN) in cooperation with Union Aid Abroad –APHEDA launched the global open letter calling on scientists, researchers and doctors and those representing victims of asbestos related disease to sign on and help stem the future epidemic of avoidable cancers in Asia and counter the lies and misinformation from the asbestos industry.

“I urge all caring scientists, researchers and doctors to join with us in signing on to send this crucial message to Asian Governments,” said Professor Ken Takahashi, Director of the Asbestos Disease Research Institute in Sydney, Australia.

While chrysotile (white) asbestos is banned in more than 60 countries already and many more no longer use it, more than 1.5 million tons a year are still being used in the world, mostly in Asia. This is despite the World Health Organisations clear recommendation to governments ‘the most efficient way to eliminate asbestos-related diseases is to stop using all types of asbestos’.

“Many governments in Asia are being bombarded with misinformation from an asbestos industry desperate to protect its last major market, Asia. We encourage scientists, doctors, researchers who agree with the content of this letter to sign on and help Asian governments be clear on the evidence,” said Kate Lee, Executive Officer of Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA.

The global evidence has been for many decades overwhelming, that all types of asbestos cause cancer among those workers, community and consumers exposed.

“More countries are introducing bans and recent bans by large asbestos producing and exporting countries such as Canada in 2016 and Brazil in 2017 mean this is a crucial moment of decision for all countries still using this deadly substance. The open letter gives solid scientific endorsement for all those efforts,” said Mr Sugio Furuya, General Secretary, Japan International Centre for Occupational Safety and Health (JICOSH) and Coordinator ABAN.

Countries and communities that were major consumers of chrysotile asbestos last century such as USA, Australia, Japan, Korea and the Europe Union are suffering the terrible health, environmental and economic consequences today.

A range of eminent international scientists and researchers have endorsed the content in this open letter and strongly urged their peers to also sign. These include:

Professor Ken Takahashi, Director, Asbestos Diseases Research Institute, Concord Clinical School, University of Sydney

Professor Richard A. Lemen, Ph.D, MSPH, USA Assistant Surgeon General (Ret.) Rear Admiral, USPHS (Ret.)

Professor Yawen Cheng, ScD, Institute of Health Policy and Management, College of Public Health, National Taiwan University

Professor Ignatius Yu , Chairman & Honorary President, Hong Kong Occupational & Environmental Health Academy, Honorary Medical Advisor, Hong Kong Workers’ Health Centre, Honorary Clinical Professor, JC School of Public Health & Primary Care

Dr Jukka Takala (Adjunct Prof), President, International Commission on Occupational Health, ICOH

Professor Tim Driscoll, Professor, Epidemiology and Occupational Medicine; Director, Master of Public Health; Sydney School of Public Health, The University of Sydney

The open letter will be open for signatures until 15 February 2018. The open letter will then be presented to governments across Asia in 2018 to help demonstrate the overwhelming evidence on the harmful impacts for their people, environment and economies of continuing to use chrysotile asbestos when so many alternatives are available.

Details of how to sign on to the letter are available at <http://apheda.org.au/asbestos-open-letter/>

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The Asian Ban Asbestos Network (A-BAN) was established in 2009 to facilitate efforts by a wide range of social parties on various aspects of asbestos issues and to achieve a ban on asbestos and the elimination of avoidable diseases and deaths.

Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA is the global justice organisation of the Australian trade union movement