

# **PRESS RELEASE**

## **26 September 2018**

### ***Australian delegation studying asbestos threats to health in Vietnam commend Vietnam Prime Minister's decision to stop asbestos roof sheet production by 2023.***

An 8 member delegation made up of trade union leaders, trainers and occupational health and safety specialists from Australia and a Shadow Assistant Minister from the Australian Labor Party in the Australian Parliament are meeting representatives of government, trade union, ban network organisations and consumers in Vietnam from 24-29 September 2018 to learn more on the issues facing Vietnam with regard to chrysotile asbestos and related cancers and other diseases caused by it.

The study tour is organised by Union Aid Abroad APHEDA, the global justice organisation of the Australian trade union movement. APHEDA has been in partnership with Vietnam organisations for over 30 years in a range of health, environment, education and labour rights programs.

Speaking during the tour, the Honorable Lisa Chesters, Shadow Assistant Minister Workplace Relations, Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional and Rural Australia and Co-Chair of the Australian Parliamentary Group on Asbestos said,

'Australia has first-hand experience on this deadly fibre, chrysotile asbestos. Australia used asbestos last century extensively and we are now years later, suffering the cost. We have 4,000 people a year in 2018 still dying of cancers caused by asbestos exposure, even though we banned it in 2003' she said.

Over 64 countries have banned chrysotile asbestos and many others have announced plans to ban asbestos. These include Canada in 2018 and Pacific Island countries in coming years. All these countries are using safe alternative products that do not contain asbestos.

'Countries today that want to ban, can fast track their bans given the advances in technology and alternatives available. Vietnam is in a position to be able to join other countries that have banned chrysotile asbestos', she added.

Mr Michael Wright, National Assistant Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union in Australia commented,

'From our experience in Australia, the use of asbestos is a triple tragedy. It's a tragedy for people's health – the cancers caused by exposure to asbestos are avoidable if countries stop using asbestos. It's an environmental tragedy as old and degrading asbestos material is often disposed of in the environment where it can release fibres into the air when disturbed. It's an economic tragedy as governments around the world have to bear the cost of this deadly industry's clean up.' he said.

The delegation is visiting Hanoi and Nghe An Province.

'We are shocked to hear of the misinformation and bullying tactics still being used by the asbestos industry and exporting countries, to try to maintain their deadly trade' said Dave McKinley, Secretary of the Electrical Trades Union of NSW, Australia.

'There is broad consensus among scientists and medical experts globally who don't work for the asbestos industry on the devastating impact on human health of breathing in to the lungs, chrysotile asbestos fibres', explained Peter Clark, Occupational Health and Safety Officer with the Construction Forestry Mining Manufacturing and Energy Union in Australia.

'We urge the Vietnam Government policy makers to consider the independent evidence, to study Australia's deadly legacy of asbestos use and follow advice of UN bodies such as WHO and ILO that the most effective way to reduce asbestos related diseases is to stop using all types of asbestos', said APHEDA Coordinator for Elimination of Asbestos Related Diseases, Mr Phillip Hazelton.

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have concluded for some decades that all types of asbestos is a carcinogen in humans, especially causing lung cancer, laryngeal cancer, ovarian cancer, mesothelioma and other lung diseases such as asbestosis. In 2004, the WHO estimated that every year there were over 100,000 deaths due to exposure to asbestos. More recent international estimates from the Global Burden of Disease Study puts the annual death rate at more than 220,000 per year. That same study estimates 2,000 deaths per year in Vietnam already from chrysotile asbestos.

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