



# Asian Ban Asbestos Network (A-BAN)

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## Media Release

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### Rotterdam Convention COP 9

**Asian delegation slams the failure for the 7<sup>th</sup> time to list chrysotile asbestos onto the Rotterdam Convention due to unethical veto of asbestos producer countries and their allies.**

**The delegation welcomes the first vote in the Convention's history and the precedent now set for chemical listing reform at COP 10 in 2021.**

This week in Geneva, representatives of countries from across the globe met for the 9<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (CoP) of the Rotterdam Convention. The Rotterdam Convention is an agreement between countries (now with 161 signatories) around the world to regulate dangerous chemicals and pesticides in order to protect people and the environment. If a chemical is listed on Annex III of the Convention then it can only be traded with "prior informed consent" to the importing country.

A six person delegation representing some of the estimated 222,000<sup>1</sup> asbestos disease victims who are dying every year and the Asian Ban Asbestos Network (ABAN) from India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Australia and Switzerland campaigned loudly for reform directly at the Conference with a vigil outside the Conference to remember the millions who have died from exposure to chrysotile asbestos, direct advocacy to delegates and direct interventions at the convention itself. This also meant also directly confronting the chrysotile asbestos industry group at the conference. An Open letter to all 161 Parties to the convention was delivered representing the international trade union movement with over 207 million workers as members, victims groups and ban groups around the world.

The open letter condemned the long term hijacking of the convention by a few countries and called for chrysotile to be listed on the convention or the convention be reformed to stop industry led veto's putting short term profit over people's lives.

Three representatives from the delegation directly addressed the conference. *Trade union leader Subono and a former asbestos factory worker from Indonesia assisted by Surya Ferdian from LION an OSH NGO in Indonesia told the conference. 'I have worked 14 years in a factory using chrysotile asbestos. I am now suffering from an asbestos related disease from that exposure. I am here representing other friends who are victims of asbestos in Indonesia and in the world. We are so angry with the countries blocking the listing at this Convention. We condemn this veto. How can the*

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<sup>1</sup> IHME Global Burden of Disease <http://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-compare/>



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*financial interests of just a few Parties block the desires of the many to protect workers like me, from toxic exposures?'*

Bernhard Herold from Solidar Suisse, the development NGO of the Swiss trade unions and also a member of the Asian delegation, strongly criticized the abuse of the consensus approach by the chrysotile lobby. *"This is not about consensus. This is about the tyranny of a small minority against a large majority. Just 10 countries blocked the will of the vast majority to list chrysotile"* he said. He told the delegates *"You cannot continue kicking the can down the road. This would be totally irresponsible, contemptuous and lastly deadly for many."*

Pooja Gupta Coordinator for India Ban Asbestos Network was in disbelief at what she heard. *'It is saddening to see that India was one of the blocking countries. I am from India and I have seen many victims and deaths due to asbestos related diseases. The position of the Indian representatives and the Fiber Cement Association talking about the safe and controlled conditions in which asbestos products are manufactured is completely untrue. There is no such thing as controlled safe use and we have so much evidence of asbestos exposures in India. Hence, I would like my government to wake up and address the issue.'*

Omana George, Asia Monitor Resource Centre Hong Kong reflected *'COP 9 has been historic to be a part of, as it was the only COP of the Rotterdam Convention 15 year history where delegates voted and abandoned the consensus approach to push through adoption of a new Annex VII on compliance. The vote result was 120 supporting and 6 opposing the proposal. This brings in new energy and possibilities to the COP especially to all of us working on the listing of chrysotile asbestos that this is a clear precedent, this vote may be the first step out of the current deadlock in the listing of chrysotile asbestos in Annex III. We now have a lot of work to do to achieve reform to listing at COP 10.'*

Phillip Hazelton Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA the global justice organisation of Australian Trade Unions proposed *'This long term blockage to listing chrysotile, the world's biggest occupational disease killer must end and it's up to those countries who are as frustrated as we are, to do it. They must come forward with a viable solution to break the blockade on the listing of chrysotile asbestos. We have some options, let's got on with it!'* he said

### **For Further Information and to arrange interviews, contact:**

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