



Asian Ban Asbestos Network (A-BAN)

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Media Release

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Rotterdam Convention COP 9

Twelve year veto of asbestos producer countries to the listing of chrysotile asbestos costing lives and making a mockery of scientific evidence and the principles of the Convention

This week in Geneva, representatives of countries from across the globe are meeting for the 9th 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”.

For the last twelve years – since the second meeting of the Convention Parties – chrysotile asbestos has been recommended for inclusion on Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention by the Convention’s independent scientific committee. However, the current requirement for consensus of all Parties before listing means it has been blocked by a few countries who profit from its use and export.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) representing 207 million workers globally, national trade unions, asbestos victims’ societies, academics, scientists, NGOs and ban asbestos networks are signatories to an open letter that will be distributed at the Conference. The letter calls on the Parties to finally list chrysotile asbestos on Annex III of the Convention and immediately reform the Convention so that a small number of states with economic interests can no longer block listings of chemicals.

A delegation representing some of the estimated 222,000¹ asbestos disease victims who are dying every year and the Asian Ban Asbestos Network (ABAN) from India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Australia and Switzerland will campaign for action directly at the Conference. Planned activities and actions organized during the Conference and to which all supporters and media are invited include:

Monday 6th May 18.30 Screening of the documentary "Breathless" (French language version) at Fonction: Cinéma, Maison des Arts du Grütli, rue du Général Dufour 16, Geneva.

Tuesday 7th May 9.00 am -10.00 am Vigil and Media Conference at the entrance to the Convention located at Centre International de Conférences Genève (CICG) 17, rue de Varembe.

Tuesday 7th May 2.00- 3.00 PM demonstration in front of the Russian Embassy located at Avenue de la Paix, à la hauteur de la Mission de Russie, mais du côté du parc du Musée Ariana.

The delegation and all supporters of the Open Letter:

- condemn the long term hijacking of the convention by a few countries;

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



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- demand that recommendations of the Convention's own Chemical Review Committee be respected and supported on the basis of the clear scientific and medical evidence presented;
- call on all Parties to COP9 to support reform of Article 22 of the Rotterdam Convention at this COP in order to allow a 75% majority vote of the Parties to include a chemical on Annex III should consensus fail;
- call on all Parties to support listing of chrysotile asbestos on Annex III of the Convention at COP9, the 7th time it has been recommended.

For Further Information and to arrange interviews, contact:

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Testimonials from the delegation members and supporters

Omana George of the Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) and delegation leader;

"I attended COP8 in 2017 and witnessed first-hand how a handful of asbestos stakeholders were able to frustrate the will of the majority of the Parties who wished to list chrysotile on Annex III. It is unconscionable that the financial interests of these few Parties can block the desires of the many to protect vulnerable populations from toxic exposures."

Pooja Gupta Coordinator India Ban Asbestos Network (IBAN) delegation member;

"Even though India banned mining of asbestos citing workers health as the reason in 1986, import and use continues and more than three hundred thousand tons of chrysotile asbestos was imported in 2017. Chrysotile is usually promoted as a material for the poor and studies used to defend the usage are part funded by the asbestos industry. There is no official recognition and acceptance of thousands of primary and secondary victims of asbestos related diseases who have been identified and they have been left to fend on their own with no compensation or rehabilitation. Last year, even the National Green Tribunal- the apex court for environmental justice- accepted that asbestos is carcinogenic and ordered scientific closure of all abandoned and illegal mines and provide compensation/rehabilitation to those suffering from the disease. Even with the recent letter published by Special Rapporteur for Human Rights and Toxics, Mr. Baskut Tuncak, on 30th April 2019 written to the Indian Governments on the issue of asbestos, there is no response from India yet. IBAN demands a complete ban on the use of all forms of asbestos and the immediate inclusion of chrysotile asbestos in the PIC list".

Phillip Hazelton Campaign Coordinator Asia for Union Aid Abroad- APHEDA delegation member;

"No progress in listing chrysotile asbestos this conference will sell out completely the millions of workers and consumers of asbestos products that are battling and succumbing to asbestos related diseases now and into the future. Why are the 66 countries that have already banned chrysotile all over the world in their own countries sitting on their hands and letting this happen? It's a disgrace and we really need them to step up and find a solution urgently either inside this convention or separate to it."

Surya Ferdian Board Member Local Initiatives OSH Network (LION) Indonesia delegation member;

"For more than 10 years INABAN has been aware of the perverted asbestos industry propaganda. The propaganda led by the Chrysotile Asbestos industry now based in Russia. It gives false information to the people and particularly the working people who work with chrysotile asbestos. INABAN will keep fighting on this to warn and protect workers and to achieve a ban on asbestos in Indonesia".

Subono Bono Chairman of SERBUK, an Indonesian trade union based in West Java, delegation member;



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"There is nothing safe in chrysotile asbestos. This asbestos is harming the people, the working people and the environment in Indonesia. We urge the Government to be aware of this kind of outrageous propaganda from the asbestos industry and immediately take action to stop asbestos entering Indonesia."

Bernhard Herold, Desk Officer for Asia at Solidar Suisse, delegation member, expressed his indignation at the passivity of the COP:

"The inability of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention to implement the recommendations of its own Chemical Review Committee for so many years is not just an embarrassment and a disgrace but it is threatening the future of the Convention as such. It is irresponsible that the COP Delegates are caving in to the pressure of a small group of countries. By doing this they are becoming co-responsible for huge number of deaths which could be avoided."

Andrew Dettmer, National President of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union;

"At the last COP meeting and following it, unions and NGOs were prevented from participating in the contact group and intercessional process on chrysotile asbestos at the insistence of the asbestos-promoting parties. However the asbestos industry was still allowed to take part. The Rotterdam process is broken, and we need to call to account these merchants of death and prevent the free flow of their deadly product throughout the world. The Rotterdam Convention needs to be changed so that a small number of countries cannot continue to block listing. Nearly a century after the ill-effects became known, the extraction, manufacture, transport, sale, installation and removal of chrysotile asbestos products is still continuing. We urgently need a real global mechanism that can lead in helping bring a global ban on this substance."

Laurie Kazan-Allen, Coordinator of the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat, commenting on the ruthless behaviour of asbestos profiteers, said:

"It seems there are no depths to which asbestos vested interests will not go to continue to profit from the commercial exploitation of asbestos. They spy on ban asbestos campaigners, they lie to civil society, they commission industry-friendly "science" and they impose economic sanctions on countries which defy them. It is appalling that they will be in Geneva sitting side by side with their national representatives. COP9 delegates must take a stand and ensure that chrysotile asbestos is listed on Annex III to protect vulnerable populations from deadly exposures. The Rotterdam Convention aims to prioritize people's health over corporate profits. It is time to list chrysotile."