

Press Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 12th, 2008

ENVIRONMENTAL, WOMEN'S, LABOUR AND HEALTH GROUPS AROUND THE WORLD CALL FOR ACTION TO SAVE THE ROTTERDAM CONVENTION

U.N. Environmental Convention is being killed by political and industry interference say groups

Geneva/Utrecht, The Netherlands:

2008 Is the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Rotterdam Convention, whose purpose is to protect human health and the environment by controlling international trade in hazardous chemicals and pesticides. But instead of celebrating, a large number of environmental, women, labour and health groups are sounding the alarm at the meeting of the Convention's Chemical Review Committee, taking place in Geneva right now.

The representatives from environmental, women's, health and labour groups are challenging several countries to stop their irresponsible conduct and stop the industry interference in the spread of dangerous asbestos to several countries in the world. Industry interference and political sabotage by a handful of countries, led by Canada, are strangling the Rotterdam Convention, say these groups from Asia, Africa, South and North America and Europe. Because of this interference, no new listing of a hazardous product under the Convention has been possible for the past four years and the groups are concerned that progress at meetings planned for this year will likewise be blocked.

Hazardous products

Under the Convention, an expert body, called the Chemical Review Committee, recommends whether a hazardous product has met the criteria of the Convention and should be placed on a special list which requires countries to obtain Prior Informed Consent before they can export the product to another country. The Convention, which has been ratified by 120 countries, came into effect in February 2004.

At its last meeting in 2006, over one hundred countries approved the recommendation made by the Chemical Review Committee that chrysotile asbestos had to be listed for Prior Informed Consent. But Canada, together with Kyrgyzstan, India, Iran, Peru and Ukraine, simply refused to let the Convention's process work and blocked action on the recommendation. They were supported by Zimbabwe, Russia and Indonesia, who have not ratified the Convention.

Canada argued that unless every single country agrees, no action should be taken to implement the Convention. "This is a death sentence for the Convention," said Joan Kuyek of Mining Watch Canada.

Asbestos

Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) is a network of 80 organisations in Western and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, working on sustainable development, health and environment, and poverty reduction.

The World Health Organization and the International Labour Organizations, among others, have called for chrysotile asbestos to be banned. Most industrialized countries have banned it. Asbestos companies are therefore aggressively targeting developing countries and the countries of Eastern Europe for expanded sales. “If chrysotile asbestos, a known deadly carcinogen, which fully met all the requirements of the Convention can be prevented from being listed, then the Convention is in grave peril,” said Laurie Kazan-Allen of the Ban Asbestos International Secretariat.

Industry interference

“Industry interference is killing the Convention,” said Kathleen Ruff of RightOnCanada. “Countries allied to the asbestos industry are putting the profits of the industry ahead of the lives of people.”

Sascha Gabizon, executive director of Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) adds:

“Industry is giving false information on chrysotile asbestos in the Eastern European and Central Asian countries, pretending that their local asbestos does not have the proven negative health effects. We have bought a few samples of asbestos on local markets, and the product is exactly the same as the asbestos which has been banned in most of the industrialized nations. We are very worried about the health of labourers in the building sector, and especially for children, as the asbestos is being used in public buildings like daycare centers and schools”.

Madhumita Dutta of the Other Media states: “The Indian government even included a representative of the asbestos industry in its delegation. And a study on asbestos presently being carried out by the Indian government was, in fact, funded by the asbestos industry.”

Stop the sabotage

“At the March 10-13 meeting of the Convention’s Chemical Review Committee, taking place in Geneva right now, sixteen representatives from the chemical industry and, in particular, lobbyists for the asbestos industry will be attending as official observers,” noted Laurie Kazan-Allen. “Given the history of industry interference, this is extremely disturbing.”

We are calling for a stop to industry interference in a Convention meant to protect health and the environment, say the groups. We are, in particular, challenging Canada, Kyrgyzstan, India, Kazakhstan, Iran, Peru and Ukraine, as well as Russia, Zimbabwe and Indonesia (who have not signed the Convention) to stop their irresponsible conduct.

Our message to them is – Stop the sabotage. Let the Convention do its job of protecting lives.

SIGNED:

*Professor Igor Hadjamberdiev, Toxic Action network Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan

*Professor Ibragim Damulojanov, Toxic Action network Central Asia, Uzbekistan

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*Sascha Gabizon, Executive Director, Women in Europe for a Common Future

*Eliezer João de Souza, President, ABREA-Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto, Brazil

*Laurie Kazan-Allen, Coordinator, International Ban Asbestos Secretariat, UK

*Penchom Saetang, Campaign for Alternative Industry Network, Thailand

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Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) is a network of 80 organisations in Western and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, working on sustainable development, health and environment, and poverty reduction.

- *Irene Fernandez, Director, Tenaganita, Malaysia
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- *Ram Charitra Sah, Executive Director, Center for Public Health and environment Development, Nepal
- *Sena Alouka, Directeur Exécutif, Jeunes Volontaires pour l'Environnement, Togo, West Africa
- *Joan Kuyek, National Coordinator, MiningWatch Canada
- *Dr. Mahmood A. Khwaja, FCSP, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan
- *Maria Gil-Beroes, Fundacion Aguaclara, Venezuela
- *Vladimir Garaba, Chisinau, Environmental Movement from Moldova
- *Kathleen Burns, Ph.D., Director, Sciencecorps, U.S.A.
- *Ilya Trombitsky, Executive Director, Eco-TIRAS, International Environmental Association of River Keepers, Moldova
- *Ban Asbestos Canada coalition, Canada
- *Ellady Muyambi, General Secretary, Uganda Network on Toxic Free Malaria Control
- *Linda Reinstein, Executive Director, Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization, U.S.A.
- *Natalya Abdullaeva, Women for Sustainable Development, Uzbekistan, Karakalpakstan
- *Jim Turk, Executive Director, Canadian Association of University Teachers, Canada
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- *Kathleen Ruff, founder, RightOnCanada, Canada
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- *Jamie Harvie, Executive Director, Institute for a Sustainable Future, U.S.A.
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