

Global Unions Campaign for 'World Asbestos Ban'

Background and History

In June 2005 Global Unions kicked off its campaign for a world ban of asbestos at the ILO conference special side-event in Geneva. For the programme and outcome of the event see: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpl_7b.EN.pdf

The launch was marked by the issuing of letters to Government, employer and trade union representatives of all countries attending the ILO Conference, requesting that they become involved in the ban asbestos campaign in some fashion. The content of the letters differed according to country groupings, based on a special analysis of country-by-country asbestos profiles produced for this purpose.

- Country cluster 1a and 1b for countries that have already banned or are expected to ban asbestos - 1a countries no longer import or export asbestos, while 1b countries still do;
- Country cluster 2: Countries that have not banned asbestos and show no record of trading in asbestos. However, the existence and use of asbestos in these countries has been documented or is highly suspected;
- Country cluster 3a and 3b: Countries that have not banned asbestos but either import or export it in varying degrees. 3a countries are the heaviest users, compared to 3b.

These country letters and country clusters are fully explained in:

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpl_7.EN.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpl_7.FR.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpl_7.SP.pdf

The country letters also requested that recipient organisations identify at least one person that would serve as a contact point with ICFTU for the follow up to the campaign (see Appendix B of the above).

At the same time, letters were written to ICFTU affiliates and the Global Union Federations, providing copies of the ILO-delivered letters and requesting that you follow up with your national government to obtain a reply, or alternatively to provide us with a short assessment of the existing situation in your country concerning issues raised in the letter.

In addition the ICFTU thrice issued a draft asbestos resolution for comment, which was then adopted by the 124th ICFTU Executive Board (Hong Kong, December 2005) and is attached. See:

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpl_7a.EN.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpl_7a.FR.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpl_7a.SP.pdf

As part of our initial follow up to the ILO activities last June, separate meetings took place in September and October regarding the campaign with ILO Safe Work, the IFBWW, the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH). A small follow up consultation meeting was held in Brussels at the end of October with the ETUC, WFPHA and some affiliates. In addition some participants who attended the UNEP Trade Union Assembly in

Kenya (see below #C.c.) and are involved in asbestos issues attended a short briefing session and provided ideas for further planning. Together, these meetings helped provide some initial feedback on the progress of work and on possible priorities for the unfolding of the campaign, at least for the next six months.

Overview of Progress and Follow Up

Trade unions or other organisations from the following country clusters have named campaign contact points, which have been added as participants to a new electronic forum for this purpose, as follows:

- Cluster #1: Trade unions from Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Italy, Japan, Malta, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, as well as the Government of Belgium;
- Cluster #2: Trade unions from Togo;
- Cluster #3: Trade unions from Bangladesh, Mexico, Philippines, United States, Vietnam and Zimbabwe, as well as the governments of Brazil and Liberia.
- Global or Sector bodies: ASBAN, BWI, ETUC, ICEM, IFJ, ILO, IMF, ICOH, ITGLWF, IUF, WFPHA, and WHO.

The ICFTU Adopted Resolution and Follow Up

We would like the adopted ICFTU resolution mentioned above to become the basis of your initial organisation and planning. You will see that the resolution contains three components:

a) The Resolution Calls on Governments and social partners to support the ban: Trade union and other bodies are urged to adopt this or a similar resolution and to establish their own asbestos ban policy. A resolution should also be used as a basis for creating dialogue with groups beyond the trade union community. Please tell us if you or others establish an asbestos ban policy, as your names will be publicly posted and publicised. For instance, besides the ICFTU and some GUFs the following organisations have so far confirmed joining our campaign:

- The International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH), the major international professional organization of Physicians and Nurses in occupational health,
- The International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE), an advocacy group representing physicians throughout Europe, Latin America, North America, Africa and Asia,
- The World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA), representing public health professionals in some 60 countries.

Adopting an asbestos ban resolution or policy applies to trade unions in all countries, since asbestos stocks still exist everywhere in some fashion and must be handled and disposed of. Moreover, it is in the interest of trade unions in every country to support the banning of any 'international' traffic of asbestos, since finished products that result from such traffic make their way into global consumption markets, and remain undetected. Also, many of countries that have banned asbestos still continue to import or export the product, as effective transition to non-asbestos uses is a long term process.

A number of affiliates have undertaken follow up to the trade union letter to governments delivered at the ILO last June. So far, replies to affiliates from governments have been received

from Denmark and Singapore only, signalling how much is still to be done in this regard. Any action on your part to obtain a formal reply from your government about its plans for asbestos would be appreciated. Alternatively, you might consider providing your own short assessment to us, as noted above, as to the current status of your government's policy with respect to the banning of asbestos.

b) The Resolution Calls on the International Labour Organisation to undertake specific action: Any communication from the constituents of ILO member States to the ILO itself about the need for a ban and concerning the measures described in the resolution is strongly encouraged.

At the coming ILO Conference this June worker, employer and trade union representatives will be in Geneva to finish negotiating a new promotional instrument for occupational health and safety. To coincide with this activity, we would once again circulate a special communication about our campaign to the various ILO constituent representatives. Whatever you do now to obtain the support of your government or employer representatives for the measures called for in our resolution would make a considerable difference to the outcomes of our efforts in June.

c) The Resolution calls on workers' and employer's organisations to engage in specific actions: Concrete actions at all levels should be undertaken to raise awareness about asbestos and its impacts and our global asbestos ban campaign, and these should be reported to us and information disseminated through the new electronic forum. Whatever you can do to coordinate your activities with those we have planned at the international level would make our action more effective. It is our aim to bring our asbestos ban to the attention of as many international bodies and arenas as possible. Besides the ILO in June, some of our activities already undertaken or to be undertaken include:

- UNEP: The recent 15-17 January UNEP Trade Union Assembly on Labour and Environment. See the adopted resolution (paragraphs 1.j. and 2.k.):

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.EN.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.FR.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.SP.pdf

- SAICM: at the 4-7 February meeting of the Strategic Approach for International Chemicals Management (SAICM) in Dubai, trade unions argued for the recognition of an asbestos ban;
- OECD: At the 1-3 March Ministerial meeting of the Environment Policy Committee (EPOC) in Paris the asbestos issue will be brought up as part of the discussions on the OECD Environmental Strategy;
- 28 April, International Commemoration Day (ICD) for Dead and Injured Workers will this year include asbestos as a main theme for action. A separate circular will soon be issued pertaining to ICD and its treatment of the asbestos issue. Moreover, we invite you to consider planning your asbestos-related activities now or scheduling to report these in time for 28 April;
- UN-CSD: At the 1-12 May Meeting of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in New York trade unions will bring up the issue as part of the thematic discussions related to industrial development. See the trade union submission at part C.28.d:

Arabic: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf//ohsewpO_4h.AR.pdf
Chinese: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf//ohsewpO_4h.CH.pdf
English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf//ohsewpO_4h.EN.pdf
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Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf//ohsewpO_4h.SP.pdf
Russian: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf//ohsewpO_4h.RU.pdf

- UN-WHO: At the 22-26 May World Health Assembly in Geneva, trade unions will attempt to raise the issue of an asbestos ban with government Health Ministers, and a special kit will be distributed for this purpose. More information on this will be circulated through our asbestos ban electronic forum (see above).

Asbestos Country Profiling and a call for Information from YOU

The overall global union strategy for asbestos is supported by ongoing publicly available country-by-country profiles on asbestos, which are available at:

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_6.EN.pdf
Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_6.FR.pdf
Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_6.SP.pdf

These contain basic information on asbestos for each country.



IcituResolutionAsbestosBan.pdf

Union Network International
<http://www.union-network.org> - contact@union-network.org