

Trade union Workshop on Asbestos and Occupational Health and Safety Issues

June 8-9 2011, New Delhi

The Building and Woodworkers International (BWI) and International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) have jointly convened the Trade Union Workshop on Asbestos and Occupational Health and Safety Issues at New Delhi on 08-09 June 2011. The workshop was attended by representatives from central trade unions, namely AITUC, BMS, CITU, HMS and INTUC and affiliated unions of the two Global Union Federations, Government, ILO, Medical and Environmental Professionals, besides ACPMA.

The declaration adopted by the Central Trade Unions and GUFs.

Joint Trade Union Declaration on Asbestos Ban

The Central trade unions and GUFs are committed to actively promote and work together on the ban of all forms of asbestos affecting the workforce and the public at large in India. With the intensive workshop deliberations spread over the two days, it has been established that all forms of asbestos, including chrysotile, are known human carcinogen. As per ILO and WHO estimates, more than 100,000 workers die every year from diseases caused by exposure to asbestos throughout the world. It has been noted that the workers in the Indian Asbestos Industry remain largely unorganised, are not aware about the dangers of asbestos and remain unclear about specific "safe work" practices. Though the asbestos industry continues to promote discredited propaganda which alleges that certain forms of asbestos can be used safely under "controlled conditions" it is scientifically established that there cannot be any safe use of Asbestos hence it has to be banned. Fifty three countries have already banned Asbestos. Safer asbestos-free alternatives do exist and could be explored based on their local availability and information exchange with other countries.

The Central trade unions along with the GUFs (including BWI and IMF) call upon the Indian Government to:

- Take immediate steps to ban all mining, manufacture, recycling and use of all forms of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials;
- Withdraw subsidies accorded to the Industry, which has increased Asbestos imports in India and in the process risking the lives of the workers and the public at large;
- Undertake and support all measures intended to eliminate asbestos and asbestos-containing products and to replace asbestos with safer alternative materials;
- Ratify the ILO convention 162 and work towards developing National Plan for the Elimination of Asbestos Related Diseases (NPEAD) in a timely manner with guidance from the ILO and WHO.
- The government should review its position vis-à-vis the Rotterdam Convention and the listing of Asbestos on the PIC;

- Ensure proper compensation to the victims of asbestos related diseases;
- Establish appropriate diagnostic infrastructure in India so that victims can be correctly diagnosed and receive timely medical treatment and rehabilitation.
- Proper implementation of the National Policy on Occupational Health and Safety in India.
- To encourage utilization of alternative materials.
- Gainful employment / transition of the Asbestos industry workers in alternative industry in a smooth manner.

Agreed Upon by:

AITUC

BMS

CITU

HMS

INTUC

IMF*

BWI*

*(*It includes the concerned GUFs affiliates)*
