

Declaration from the International Asbestos Conference, made in Vienna, May 7, 2014

The Building and Woodworkers International (BWI) together with IndustriAll Global Union at the International Asbestos Conference in Vienna in May 2014, attended by representatives from Trade Unions from 41 countries, the International Trade Union Confederation, the International Union of Foodworkers, IUF, the International Labour Organisation, the International Association of Labour Inspection (IALI) and the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS), issue the following declaration.

The organisations represented at the Vienna Conference are committed to: promoting the global ban of all forms of asbestos from the construction industry and from all other industrial sectors; promoting the effective regulation by law of work with in-situ asbestos in demolition, conversion, renovation and maintenance works as well as recycling and disposal of waste; working for the elimination of diseases caused by asbestos; promoting social justice for those affected by asbestos.

Considering that:

- All forms of asbestos, including chrysotile, are classified as known human carcinogens by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and by the International Programme for Chemical Safety, and recognised as such by the international scientific community.
- All asbestos produced is chrysotile, almost all of which is used for asbestos cement materials.
- At least 107, 000 workers die every year from diseases caused by exposure to asbestos.
- It has taken three decades of efforts and the emergence of suitable alternatives for a comprehensive ban on the manufacture and use of asbestos and asbestos-containing products to be adopted in more than fifty countries. Furthermore, these countries now permit the handling of in-situ asbestos only during asbestos removal, demolition, renovation and maintenance work carried out under strictly controlled working conditions.
- The most pressing concern is the situation concerning asbestos in the developing world with increasing consumption of chrysotile and weak regulatory and protection systems.

The organisations represented at the Vienna conference call upon the governments and social partners of all countries to:

- take immediate steps to ban all mining, manufacture, recycling and use of all forms of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials as soon as possible;
- take immediate steps to develop National Action Programmes for the Elimination of Asbestos Related Diseases following the guidance of the International Labour Office and the World Health Organisation. This should be done in all countries, whether or not they already have a ban;
- undertake and support all measures intended to eliminate asbestos and asbestos-containing products from the economic cycle and to replace asbestos with less harmful products;
- implement comprehensive Just Transition programmes to protect employment of those currently working in the asbestos cement sector through efficient conversion of the industry;
- make the protection of workers against asbestos exposure a priority through Trade Union representation in the building sector and through effective state Labour Inspection;
- ratify and implement the provisions of ILO Convention 162 (1986), Safety in the Use of Asbestos, and to implement the provisions of its accompanying Recommendation 172 as a minimum standard not to be fallen below;
- prohibit by law the trans-shipment of asbestos, asbestos containing materials and wastes;
- ensure proper compensation, medical treatment and support for the victims of asbestos related diseases;
- carry out an extensive mapping and registration of asbestos in buildings, trains, ships, water pipes with a view to prevention of exposure and the eventual controlled removal;
- put in place an information, communication and training plan, targeted in particular at younger and migrant construction workers, about handling of asbestos;
- increase pressure on the countries mining and exporting asbestos to implement Just Transition programmes to provide a sustainable future for workers and communities dependent on it – namely Russia, Kazakhstan, Zimbabwe, China and Brazil.

Asbestos is the world's worst industrial killer. The human right to safe work and the dignity of labour can never be achieved where asbestos use continues. Strengthening international cooperation is key to achieving these goals.