

# BWI Asbestos Conference

Ramamurthy Karnan  
President, INRLF  
India

6 -7th May 2014  
Vienna, Austria

# India: Challenges

- India has the second highest consumption rate in the world, and it is increasing: latest figures show 493,000 metric tons were used in the year 2012. That is three and a half times as much as 145 thousand tons used in the year 2000.
- Asbestos is a strong industry in India and stakes are high
- Most of the workers in the unorganized sector; contract workers, daily wagers, migrant workers, unprotected and no idea of dangers
- Lack of Data and Statistics and Problems in medical diagnosis; establishing occupational history.



# Recent Developments

- The Kerala High Court in January 2012 held that the government of India should consider prohibiting the import, manufacture and use of asbestos to prevent health hazards.
- “Asbestos, including the fibre and its products, is banned in all developed countries as it is known to be hazardous to health and is one of the causes of lung cancer. So India should think of its prohibition,” the court said.
- The court pointed out that counsel for Customs, informed that there was no ban on the import of asbestos fibre and related materials though they are hazardous to health.



# Recent developments

- India reverses stand on asbestos at Rotterdam Convention meet on May 8<sup>th</sup> 2013
- During the fifth Conference of Parties (COP5) in June 2011, the Indian delegation had agreed to the listing of chrysotile asbestos in the PIC list, and received a standing ovation at the plenary.
- Civil society members campaigning for a global ban on asbestos expressed shock at India retracting from its earlier decision, and allege that the Indian delegation was influenced by the industry lobby to take such a stand.



# AREAS OF ACTION by Trade Union

- Capacity Building
  - Trade Union Leaders
  - Workers
  - Asbestos Users
  - Public surrounding the Asbestos Manufacturing Plant
  - Government Officials
  - Media
- Advocacy
  - To Implement ILO and WHO policy on Asbestos
  - To Implement World Standards in phasing out Asbestos
- Network and Alliance Building
  - Network among Parliamentarians, medical and legal professionals.
  - To support victim groups fighting for compensation battles.
  - To maintain alliances with like-minded movements / organizations such as BANI, ANROAV etc.

# Banning Asbestos Role of Trade Unions

- Unions are conducting **Rallies, Local language publication on Asbestos, Awareness program for the Trade Union leaders, Awareness of alternative materials & Village level Study Circle Meetings.**
- The major resistance that the trade union are facing are the
  - Powerful Pro Asbestos Lobby or Manufactures
  - Alternative materials for Asbestos at the cheaper rate
  - People mindset on asbestos to be changed
  - Government and People representatives not aware of Harmful effects of Asbestos

# Banning Asbestos: Role of Trade Unions



- TCWF petitioned the Govt of Tamilnadu on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2010 for banning Asbestos in the State as a proactive step the Govt of Tamilnadu issued notification to remove Asbestos Roof in School Building.
- As a result of the union memorandum, the Government announced that Asbestos roofing of 5500 primary and middle schools would be removed and shall be replaced by using a combination of environment friendly tiles, wooden and iron slabs.

# Banning Asbestos Role of Trade Unions

- TCWF will soon sign an agreement with Builders Association of India Tamilnadu Chapter on gradually stopping the use of Asbestos.
- Periodic meetings with Government officials on Banning Asbestos in their respective state.
- Unions have sent letters to elected representatives of the people on the harmful effects of Asbestos in several local Indian languages.





# Role of Indian BWI Affiliates

- In **Gujarat**, BMS has formed Gujarat Accident Victims Association (GAVA)
- IWMD event organized on Asbestos awareness in **Kerala**  
Petition submitted to Railway authorities on dangers of Asbestos
- Letter writing campaign to **Government of India** to support listing of Chrysotile during Rotterdam Convention Meeting at Geneva (2013)
- Collaboration with OEHNI to organize medical camp for Asbestos workers in **Orissa** state as part of medical surveillance – you could propose something similar in Tamil Nadu (2014 planned)

# Recommendation to Government

- Constitute a multi-disciplinary committee to draw up an action plan for phasing out asbestos production and use in the country. **Follow the ILO WHO National Action Plan for Elimination of Asbestos Diseases**
- Work out mechanisms with the state governments for long term medical surveillance, health care and compensation of asbestos workers and their families

## CONCLUSION

Banned in most of the countries, asbestos is India's next big killer. At the moment its proven death due to past exposure to asbestos, and some jobs are effectively a death sentence. There is no safe level of exposure, so there is no acceptable level of exposure. This is the preventable health calamity of the modern era.

"Asbestos is a threat to everyone, not just workers. Asbestos does not affect any particular Colour, Blood or Race of Human Kind, From children in schools, to young and old in private and public buildings where asbestos is present and to whole communities where it exists as a epidemic"

Thank you