

## **PRESSE RELEASE**

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### **ASBESTOS AND THE ROTTERDAM CONVENTION:**

#### **A NEW ANNOUNCED SABOTAGE**

The delegates from 164 countries are meeting in Geneva on 12-13-14 May for the *Conference of Parties* of the **Rotterdam Convention**.

The simple and modest purpose of this Convention – linked to the Basel and Stockholm Conventions which precede it – is not to ban or hinder trade; it is meant to regulate information on hazards of exported products. The basis of the Rotterdam Convention is the PIC procedure «prior informed *consent*» which requires that a country exporting a dangerous product should inform the importing country about the hazards and the prevention processes and thus obtain its consent.

However this obligation only exists when the product is included in a list established by the Rotterdam Convention. This list contains over forty products like products derived from mercury, DDT, endosulfan and varieties of amphibole asbestos.

The necessity to include on this list chrysotile asbestos – the only asbestos variety which is commercialised – should be obvious to any informed person with common sense : the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Union for Control of Cancer (UICC) and societies of epidemiology from all around the world, to name only a few, have repeatedly stated that

- chrysotile causes diseases, among them mesothelioma (cancer of pleura), lung cancer and fibrosis
- asbestos is extremely hazardous, impossible to control and is responsible yearly for more than 100 000 deaths.

Yes but ... The Rotterdam Convention is a body under the umbrella of United Nations where consensus rule is a strong tradition.

There is no product for which scientific consensus on hazardness and magnitude of mortality is stronger than that for asbestos. Even the World Trade Organisation found that France was right against Canada, when the French government banned chrysotile asbestos in 1996, for health reasons, and Canada attacked the decision claiming it was hindering trade.

Yes but ... the Rotterdam Convention did not install a rule which would forbid any country to declare that the earth is flat or that the use of chrysotile asbestos does not entail serious hazards.

During the previous meetings of the Rotterdam Convention the following countries opposed a veto to the inscription of chrysotile asbestos on the PIC list of hazardous substances:

2004: Canada

2006: Canada, India, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Peru

2008: Canada, India, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, Ukraine, Vietnam

2011: Canada

2013: Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Vietnam, Zimbabwe

- Canada - historically the largest producer of asbestos and also the great promoter of deceitful and murderous propaganda on the harmlessness of chrysotile asbestos – does not produce anymore asbestos since 2012 and, since then, refrains from taking a stand.
- Russia is nowadays, with Kazakhstan, the great producer and exporter : Russia produces 50% of the world asbestos, that means a million of tonnes every year, and its market share represents around 60% of global exportations. Russia has been part of the Convention since 2013 ...
- The two other producers of asbestos do not interfere : China uses almost all the asbestos it extracts and imports even more, whereas Brazil exports about half of its production.
- India is the biggest importer of asbestos. It is frightening to see that a country which suffered an industrial catastrophe as the tragedy of the Bhopal factory (1984) could choose to protect the commercial interests of a few merchants before the information of its population. By the way the company Union Carbide was one of the giant asbestos companies.

ANDEVA will be present in Geneva, together with many associations of defense of victims and public health. They won't be alone, the asbestos merchants and their associations of propaganda and corruption will also be there.

The result is difficult to swallow: the cynism of merchants of asbestos and death is beyond doubt incurable, but it is absurd to see state governments – in the past, Canada, today mainly Russia and India – let themselves be convinced by a handful of unscrupulous merchants to let their own population and others be poisoned.

Many voices join the concerns of our associations:

- the Canadian Medical Association Journal has published an editorial calling for the Canadian Government to stand firm for a ban on asbestos in Canada and worldwide.
- the UN Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes declared he was disturbed by the failure to include chrysotile asbestos and paraquat – one of the most commercialised pesticide and one of the most hazardous – and recalled articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of Child, stating the right to access to information as essential.

We wish that the voice of reason and true consensus will prevail.