

ROCA - Rotterdam Convention Alliance

ROCA is an Alliance of Environmental, Labour and Health organizations around the world working to promote the full and effective implementation of the Rotterdam Convention

October 31, 2008 Update by Kathleen Ruff, Coordinator of the Rotterdam Convention Alliance, currently attending COP4 in Rome

1) Maria Neira of the World Health Organization made a powerful presentation at the plenary session of the Conference yesterday, Thursday. She spoke about the "global epidemic of asbestos-related disease". She talked about the more than 400,000 people in Europe who will die in the next 20 years from asbestos-related disease and the \$5 billion it is costing Europe for health costs and compensation. She said the costs cannot be measured in economic terms. She spoke of the people learning each day that they have mesothelioma and other cancers from asbestos exposure. All these deaths are preventable. She put a human face on chrysotile asbestos disease.

She said that the WHO is conducting a global campaign to eliminate asbestos-related disease and the way to do this is to stop the use of all forms of asbestos.

She said the "Human health must be put before trade." She said that the Rotterdam Convention was created to protect human health but that it will fail in this if chemicals that meet all the Convention's criteria for listing are not listed.

2) Report from Eloise Touni of the Pesticide Action Network, UK. Eloise attended the meetings of the Implementation Group who are working to try to find a way of resolving the impasse that we are facing here in Rome with the refusal of a small number of countries to allow listing of chrysotile asbestos and endosulfan.

Eloise reported at our civil society meeting this morning that Canada, together with Iran, played a very obstructive role at this meeting. The EU and other countries put forward the proposal that those chemicals and pesticides that meet all the Convention's criteria, but have been blocked from getting listed under the Convention's prior informed consent procedure, should be subject to a voluntary application of the prior informed consent procedure.

Canada opposed this voluntary application of the prior informed consent procedure for chrysotile asbestos, saying it would weaken the Convention and Canada does not wish to weaken the Convention.