

New Delhi Declaration

Seeking Elimination of all forms of Asbestos including Chrysotile from India

Date: 24 March, 2011

Recalling the Ban Asbestos Resolution of 2002, WHO Resolution of 2005 and ILO Resolution of 2006 seeking elimination of future use of asbestos of all forms, in the face of massive asbestos exposure underway in India;

Taking note of The White Asbestos (Ban on Use and Import) Bill, 2009 introduced in Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Indian Parliament) and the order of the Kerala State Human Rights Commission banning the use of asbestos in schools;

Considering the anti asbestos movement against 12 proposed asbestos plants in Bihar in face of massive people's resistance;

Outraged at the Union of India's Budget 2011-12's callous reference to asbestos by including it under the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana to cover 'unorganized sector workers in hazardous mining and associated industries like asbestos etc' and on the other hand Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister's Budget is allocating land for 4 new asbestos plants;

Recognising the fact that enviro-occupational health infrastructure in India is weak or non-existent in the face of workers and consumers who are sick and dying from asbestos-caused cancer and other related diseases;

Endorsing The STATEMENT OF OBJECTS AND REASONS of The White Asbestos (Ban on Use and Import) Bill, 2009 introduced in the Indian Parliament that reads: "The white asbestos is highly carcinogenic even the World Health Organisation has reported that it causes cancer. It is a rare fibrous material that is used to make rooftops (roofing material) and break (brake) linings. More than fifty countries have already banned the use and import of white asbestos. Even the countries that export it to India prefer not to use it domestically. But in our country, it is imported without any restriction. Canada and Russia are the biggest exporters of white asbestos. In 2007, Canada exported almost Ninety five percent of the white asbestos it mined and out of it forty-three percent was shipped to India. It is quite surprising that our country is openly importing huge quantity of a product, which causes cancer. This is despite the fact that safer and almost cheap alternatives to asbestos are available in the country. Instead of importing a hazardous material, it will be better if we spend some money in research and development and use environment friendly product. In view of the above, there is an urgent need for a total ban on the import and use of white asbestos and promote the use of alternative material."

Appreciating Supreme Court of India's order of 21st January, 2011 that takes cognizance of the above mentioned Bill and the resolutions of ILO and WHO and seeks government to take immediate preventive steps;

Taking cognizance of the human rights violation involved in exposing people to killer

asbestos fibers and how even if few asbestos fibre reach the right places, it causes irreversible damage - leading to asbestosis, lung cancer or mesothelioma;

Considering Government of India's role in preventing the listing of chrysotile asbestos as a hazardous product under the Rotterdam Convention, an International Agreement that requires that importing countries be warned of the risks associated with hazardous products is unbecoming of a nation of India's stature. It is unconscionable that the government knowingly allows trades in a killer product that will cause death of hundreds of thousands of people in India in general and in Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Bihar and Rajasthan in particular and elsewhere in the world;

Reminding the Government of India that there is incontrovertible evidence that creates a compelling logic for making India asbestos free;

Condemning the asbestos exporting countries liaison with the Indian asbestos industry to which Government is turning a blind eye who have unleashed a misinformation campaign about controlled use of asbestos products which is a fantasy;

Disapproving Ministry of Environment & Forests Experts Appraisal Committee on Industry for approving environmental clearance of asbestos plants;

Asserting the fact that so far some 55 countries have banned all forms of asbestos, and are already using alternative materials;

Underlining that almost every international health agency of repute including the World Health Organization, the International Labor Organization, International Agency for Research on Cancer, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, and the American Cancer Society agree there is no safe level of asbestos exposure. Most recently, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) reconfirmed that all commercial asbestos fibers - including chrysotile, the most commercially used form of asbestos - cause lung cancer and mesothelioma. In addition, IARC newly confirmed that there is sufficient evidence that asbestos causes ovarian cancer and reconfirmed asbestos causes laryngeal cancer;

We urge the Government to adequately compensate the victims of asbestos-related diseases, create a database of asbestos exposed people and victims as well as besides providing legal and possible medical relief and taking preventive measures. We call on the government to create a mesothelioma registry and a building registry of those facilities which have asbestos. We seek inclusion of environmental and occupational health study in the medical education of all the 300 medical colleges in India

We recommend that the Government should start efforts to decontaminate asbestos laden buildings including schools and hospitals

We express shock at the instance countries like Canada using tax-payers money and Canadian embassies to actively promote the sale of asbestos around the world;

We appeal to the Government of India to put a ban on export, import, manufacturing, use and mining of all forms of asbestos including chrysotile (white) in India.

We call upon the Government of India, State Governments in general and Bihar Government in Particular besides Indian Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Ministry of Mines to initiate steps for an immediate ban on use, manufacture and trade of all forms of asbestos (including Chrysotile or White Asbestos).

Endorsed by:

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