



December 8, 2015

**Re: Open Letter to Global Asbestos Industry**

To Whom It May Concern,

In recent weeks it has become obvious that renewed efforts are being made by parties seeking to profit from the commercial exploitation of asbestos, despite the fact that all forms of this substance have been found to be deadly to human life, as are all commercial products containing it, including asbestos-cement, where processes of degradation inevitably release fibres into the environment.

In Zimbabwe, funding is currently being sought to revive a chrysotile asbestos mine,<sup>1</sup> in Sri Lanka, asbestos stakeholders are putting pressure on the government to revoke plans for a 2018 asbestos ban,<sup>2</sup> while in Vietnam, where the government has pledged to outlaw asbestos by 2020, a trade association representing asbestos interests mounted an event to disseminate propaganda “proving” that asbestos can be used safely under “controlled conditions.”<sup>3</sup>

Even as these developments were occurring, ban asbestos activists and health and safety campaigners in Asia and elsewhere were distributing accurate and updated information regarding the health hazards posed by the continuing use of asbestos. Working together they continue to develop innovative public outreach initiatives, accumulate accurate data on consumption and production, and explore options for ever closer collaborations to protect occupational and public health.

In November 2015, representatives from Vietnam and Laos made presentations at the 2<sup>nd</sup> international conference of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency in Australia detailing their countries’ asbestos challenges. Subsequent discussions which took place in Brisbane and in Canberra reinforced the willingness of international experts and Australian activists to provide support for ban asbestos mobilization not only in these countries but throughout Asia.

On November 26, 2015, the importance of grassroots efforts to address the asbestos threat was acknowledged when an international peer-review journal allowed free access to a stunning new commentary which highlighted the human cost of asbestos profits:

...this study provides strong evidence of an association between pleural mesothelioma [asbestos cancer] and the use of asbestos-cement roofing... and pavement with asbestos tailings... These findings are a reminder that industrial use and production of asbestos can have an impact on communities long after the industries are gone. The cost of cleanup from these past activities may be exorbitant, such as in Libby, Montana where the US EPA has spent at least \$447 million since 1999, and the cleanup is expected to last several more years. The population of Libby is only 2691 people and the cost of the cleanup per person is about \$165,000 per person thus far. Countries currently using or producing asbestos should take heed to the lessons learned from Casale Monferrato, Libby and other communities around the world that are suffering from their past use

<sup>1</sup> *Mashava asbestos mine requires \$38m, says CEO*. November 10, 2015. [http://www.newzimbabwe.com/business-25974-Mashava+asbestos+mine+requires+\\$38m/business.aspx](http://www.newzimbabwe.com/business-25974-Mashava+asbestos+mine+requires+$38m/business.aspx)  
<sup>2</sup> *Manufacturers Defend Use Of Asbestos Sheets*. November 12, 2015. <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2015/11/15/manufacturers-defend-use-of-asbestos-sheets/>  
<sup>3</sup> *Vietnam Asbestos Offensive*. November 25, 2015. <http://ibasecretariat.org/lka-vietnam-asbestos-offensive.php>

and/or production of asbestos. Ultimately it is the communities that most likely will bear the costs in terms of health and for the cleanup of their homes and environments.”<sup>4</sup>

This text is now being translated into Chinese, Russian and Portuguese for distribution in the countries which produce 90+% of all the asbestos consumed worldwide.<sup>5</sup>

In scores of countries around the world, asbestos claimants have won lawsuits against guilty employers, product manufacturers, building owners and negligent governments. The financial costs of asbestos litigation are in the billions. In 2015, no independent judiciary will accept defendants’ claims that they were unaware of the hazards posed by asbestos. If you profit from the sale of asbestos, you will be held liable for the diseases you have caused and the damage you have done, not only to your workers but also to members of the public who have been injured by using your products or breathing the air your factories have poisoned.

In recognition of the global asbestos challenge and in solidarity with asbestos victims, trade unionists and activists working to support the injured and end asbestos deaths, we hereby declare our determination to continue the campaign to end the use of asbestos and eradicate the threat it poses. We urge all asbestos producers, manufacturers, business people, lobbyists and stakeholders to take responsibility and adopt safer asbestos-free technologies. The future is asbestos-free!

Signed,

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Dr. Van Thi Do, VN-BAN Co-Founder and Director of the Vietnam Non-Governmental Organizations Information Center (NGO-IC Vietnam)

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Peter Tighe, CEO of Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, Australia

Paul Bastian, National Secretary, Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union

Kate Lee, Executive Officer, Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA | the Humanitarian Aid Agency of the Australian Council of Trade Unions

Fiona Murie, Occupational Safety and Health Director, Building and Wood Workers International, Switzerland

Sanjiv Pandita, Executive Director, Asia Monitor Resource Centre, Hong Kong

Sugio Furuya, Coordinator, Asian Ban Asbestos Network and Director, Ban Asbestos Network of Japan

Laurie Kazan-Allen, Coordinator, International Ban Asbestos Secretariat, UK

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<sup>4</sup> Stayner, L. *Para-occupational exposures to asbestos: lessons learned from Casale Monferrato, Italy*. November 2015.

<http://oem.bmj.com/content/early/2015/11/09/oemed-2015-103233.full?keytype=ref&siteid=bmjournals&ijkey=anYWol7tqbxTU>

<sup>5</sup> United States Geological Survey. *Estimated Asbestos Trade Data*. 2014.

[http://ibasecretariat.org/world\\_asbestos\\_consumption\\_estimates\\_2014\\_w.pdf](http://ibasecretariat.org/world_asbestos_consumption_estimates_2014_w.pdf)