

Press Release

“India should bury asbestos, not people”

Medical Scientists Adopt & Endorse *New Delhi Declaration Seeking Elimination of Chrysotile (White) Asbestos*

New Delhi/24 March 2011: Sounding the alarm bells for Indians, Dr Alec Farquhar, Managing Director, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Canada said, “We now have around 500 asbestos cancer cases every year in Ontario from a population of 13 million. If you (India) continue on your current path, you will multiply our death count by 100 times. That would be 50, 000 Indian workers dying every year from asbestos. In Ontario, we learned that safe use of asbestos is impossible. I urge you from the bottom of my hear, please do not make the same mistake as we made in Canada. Stop using asbestos and use a safe alternative.”

Deeply disturbed by the state of affairs in India with regard to asbestos consumption, Professor Elihu D Richter MD MPH, Hebrew University-Hadassah School of Medicine, Israel said, “All form of asbestos kill. India should bury asbestos, not people. Here is a case for examining whether those countries which export asbestos to India are committing a crime against humanity, because they are engaging in willful neglect. India should not repeat the mistakes of going back some 70 years which will kill tens of thousands of workers and their families.” Richter called on experts in human rights to reframe the carcinogen as a human rights violation to ban asbestos.

“No matter what mis-information comes of Canada or the Indian asbestos industry about Chrysotile, there is no question that science has shown that Chrysotile causes asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. This is the conclusion of World Health Organisation. The International Agency for Research on Cancer, and other organizations that have no biases except for protecting people’s health,” said Prof. Arthur L Frank, PhD, Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, Drexel University School of Public Health, US.

Why does Canada apply strict measures domestically to protect the health of Canadians handling asbestos and yet exports asbestos to developing countries such as India, where the capacity to implement and monitor the application of similar precautionary measures is inadequate?, asked Dr. T.K. Joshi, Fellow, Collegium Ramazzini, Italy, an independent, international academy founded in 1982 by Irving J. Selikoff, Cesare Maltoni and other eminent scientists. The academy comprises of 180 internationally renowned experts in the fields of occupational and environmental health. The mission of the Collegium Ramazzini is to advance the study of occupational and environmental health issues and to be a bridge between the world of scientific discovery and the social and political centers which must act on the discoveries of science to protect public health.

Prof (Dr) Qamar Rahman, fellow of National Academy of Sciences, Dean, Integral University, Lucknow & former Deputy Director, Industrial Toxicology Research Centre, Lucknow asserted, “This is high time that Government of India should ban the use of

asbestos in India. It has been proven scientifically that asbestos based articles such as roof ceilings, storage tanks will release fibers. The asbestos fibers will be the cause of exposure to our coming generations.”

“It is well known around the world that asbestos is hazardous to human health, and that there is no such thing as “safe use” of asbestos, just like there is no “safe cigarette”. The government of India would do better to aim for growth through development of safe industries, and to lower the prices of substitutes, rather than promote use of this hazardous substance,” opined Dr Yael Stein, MD, Unit of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Hebrew University, Israel.

Lyle Hargrove, Chairperson, Occupational Clinics for Ontario Workers, Canada said, “I believe that it is real Black mark on my Canada for exporting ASBESTOS to India. We have cities devastated by Asbestos Manufacturing in the sixties and 70s. Workers were dying from Asbestos diseases and others were Sick including people that work in the plants, their family was getting sick as well. I demand that Canada quit exporting Asbestos to India and quit mining in Quebec. Asbestos is too dangerous to work with and I believe there is no safe level.”

New Delhi Declaration Seeking Elimination of all forms of asbestos including chrysotile from India was adopted and endorsed by eminent scientists and doctors on 24th March, 2011 at a Round Table which happened immediately after the conclusion of International Conference on "Emerging Trends in Preventing Occupational Respiratory Diseases and Cancers in Workplace". The Declaration is given below.

The delegates at the Round Table took stock of the Ban Asbestos Movement in Bihar, reference to asbestos in the Union Budget, land allot for asbestos plants in Bihar, promotion of asbestos in Tamil Nadu and Odisha and other states, the regressive proposal by Indian Bureau of Mines at the behest of chrysotile asbestos miners to lift the existing ban on asbestos mining in India and the and Ban White Asbestos Bill.

These delegates shared their considered views and gave their valuable hand written notes so that it can be used in a credible way while strongly recommending the need for immediate ban on asbestos to Government of India, State Governments and the relevant ministries.

The conference was organised by Centre for Occupational Health, New Delhi supported by Union Ministry of Labour & Employment, ESI, DGMS and DGFASL in collaboration with Drexel University, US at Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi from 22-24 March. The conference was deeply concerned about asbestos related diseases and the alarming rise of asbestos in India.

The Round Table was organized by Ban Asbestos Network of India (BANI), which has been working for asbestos free India. BANI has been campaigning for a asbestos free India and is assisting the Asbestos Mukti Andolan in Bihar.

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