

## **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

### **Press Release**

## **Rotterdam Convention in shambles as India plays dirty**

**29<sup>th</sup> October 2008, Rome, Italy:** Head of Indian delegation to the 4<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP4) of Rotterdam Convention in Rome, Mr R H Khawaja, Additional Secretary in Ministry of Environment and Forests objected to the listing of Chrysotile asbestos and Endosulphan, a pesticide, in the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) list of the Convention. The PIC list ensures that there is a fair and transparent mechanism of information exchange between the countries of export and import on the hazards of chemicals on human and environmental health prior to trade.

"India's position is disgraceful. Not only does it not protect its own people from harm, India also denies other countries, especially poorer countries to protect its people from harm by depriving them of information," said Madhumita Dutta of Corporate Accountability Desk of The Other Media, a Chennai based NGO attending the COP 4 in Rome.

India based its entrenched position on flawed science. On the issue of Endosulphan India attempted to misinform the UN plenary about non-availability of data on health impacts due to Endosulphan. The study by National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) on the impact of Endosulphan spraying in Kerala was misconstrued by Dr M K Pandey, Advisor MOEF while presenting India's position.

"India should have used this opportunity to explain to the world the immense problem it's facing in handling Endosulphan poisoning and should have shared the actual findings of the NIOH health study. Instead it clearly played into the hands of the industry, who are present in Rome in big numbers, and even dared to make a false statement in the plenary", said Sridhar Radhakrishnan of Thanal, a Kerala based NGO attending the COP 4.

While stating India's objection to the listing of Chrysotile asbestos on PIC list, head of Indian delegation informed the plenary "India has commissioned a study to National Institute of Occupational Health to study the health impact of chrysotile asbestos and it will take two more years for the study to be completed. Till the study is completed, India will not be in a position to take a decision on the listing".

"The NIOH study being referred to by India has been severely criticized by nine independent scientists as fundamentally flawed, ill designed and will not reveal the true extent of health damage. The study is being sponsored and technically reviewed by the Indian asbestos industry, the same people who are hobnobbing with the Indian official delegation in COP. It is biased and travesty of what is credible science," stated Dutta.

In response to the Indian position on Chrysotile asbestos and Endosulphan, most of the developing countries from African, Latin American, South East Asia many of whom are importers of these chemicals responded by emphasising the need for PIC listing of these chemicals and their sovereign right to information, that helps protect public health. "We appeal to countries opposing the listing to take back their opposition", was a unanimous statement coming from delegations from these countries. Interestingly, India was backed by Pakistan in obstructing the listings.

"Chrysotile is a human carcinogen for which there is no known safe level of exposure", state the representative from World Health Organisation in response to the position taken by India and few others.

India's shameful position in COP4 has threatened the effectiveness of the Rotterdam Convention in its 10<sup>th</sup> year of being in force, which works on the principle of consensus, right to know and prior consent. "For a chemical to be listed in the PIC list there has to be a consensus amongst all the parties to the Convention, which is being exploited by India to block the Convention."

Due to the Indian position which has created an impasse in the listing procedure of these substances, the president of the COP4 has tasked the Australian head of delegation to come up with a solution. "The coming two days are quite crucial to the listing of these substances and we genuinely hope India does not let down this global environmental initiative", said Radhakrishnan.

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