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Media Release: Global Asbestos Action Alliance on failure of Rotterdam Convention

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MEDIA RELEASE

Asbestos Action Alliance says Rotterdam Convention itself has failed miserably as chrysotile asbestos and three other chemicals blocked again from listing, continuing to put millions of workers at risk.

Geneva, 3rd May 2017

The Global Union Alliance has slammed those countries blocking listing of chrysotile asbestos and three other chemicals under the Convention as they protect their dirty industries over the rights of people in developing countries to be informed of the deadly materials entering their countries.

The eighth Conference of Parties to the Rotterdam Convention, a United Nations treaty that requires dangerous substances on Annex III to be traded with prior informed consent, is currently taking place in Geneva, Switzerland.

This is the sixth time these countries have blocked chrysotile despite it meeting all requirements for listing.

The countries blocking listing of chrysotile today included **Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Zimbabwe and Syria**. Russia even proposed taking chrysotile off the list of proposed chemicals for listing, a move not permitted under the convention.

Sharan Burrow, general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) said: "Another generation will be blighted by asbestos disease as a result of past exposures. But the chrysotile industry is determined to inflict this deadly epidemic on our grandchildren too. This criminal cabal of cancer pushers must be put out of business and brought to justice. We will do all we can to make sure this happens."

"Failure to list chrysotile asbestos on Annex III once again is an absolute disgrace. While they dither, a quarter of a million people will die from asbestos-related diseases" said Andrew Dettmer, National President of IndustriALL affiliate, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU).

The European Union, Australia, Canada, Uruguay and a group of Pacific Island states among many others, spoke strongly for listing of chrysotile. Several of these countries pointed out the consensus requiring Convention is being badly undermined by the continual failures in listing recommended chemicals like chrysotile.

“Consensus decision making, requires a good faith approach. That is missing entirely here with the repeated action of these 6 countries. These countries are deliberately de-railing the convention to protect their dirty industry. Their veto power must be taken away from them through reform of the convention voting system” said Phillip Hazelton from Union Aid Abroad APHEDA.

“We commend the 12 African countries who have brought a proposal forward to solve this problem at this meeting. We urge all the parties to the convention from the 157 countries present, to support that initiative or find another solution before this meeting concludes on Friday” said Sari Sairanen from Unifor the biggest private sector trade union in Canada.

The session considering listing of chrysotile today at the Convention heard emotional pleas for listing by many as well as building frustration at the blocking tactics.

The representative from Uruguay explained: “This issue is a rights issue. Listing still allows you the right to produce a chemical and sell a chemical but we have a right to be informed of its hazards, as an equal right. We need prior informed consent for chrysotile”.

Representing asbestos victims suffering asbestos related diseases globally, asbestosis sufferer, Siti Krisitina called for action and brought the reality of chrysotile to the meeting.

“I was exposed to asbestos in the factory for 23 years. If asbestos got under our clothes it was difficult to remove it. After ten years I started coughing. In 2010, I was diagnosed with asbestosis. I am just one and many of friends have been suffering.”

Australia has some of the highest rates of mesothelioma in the world. A country representative told the plenary. “We have and continue to pay a high-price for using chrysotile asbestos. An estimated 25,000 Australians are expected to die from asbestos-related diseases over next 40 years. Removing asbestos from buildings in just one city, Canberra, is expected to cost \$1 billion” he said.

The Global Asbestos Action Alliance is supported by:

International Trade Union Confederation, European Trade Union Confederation, Australian Council of Trade Unions, New Zealand Council of Trade Unions, Trades Union Congress, Canadian Labor Congress, AFL-CIO, IndustriALL Global Union, BWI Global Union, Asia Ban Asbestos Network, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Unifor, Unite the Union, CCOO (Spain), Associated Labor Union (Philippines), Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization (ADAO), Solidar Suisse, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA.

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