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The UN-sponsored Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention, comprising representatives from 180 countries, met this week in Geneva to review the list of toxic chemicals in Annex III, hazardous wastes, and regulations of the trade in harmful substances.

Appendix III of the Rotterdam Convention contains 47 chemicals, of which 33 are pesticides and 14 are industrial chemicals.

Chrysotile asbestos, or white asbestos, has been banned in many parts of the world for its carcinogenicity (see list on http://www.ibasecretariat.org/chron_ban_list.php) but is not listed in the list of hazardous substances established by the Rotterdam Convention.

For more than ten years a coordination of trade unions and NGOs has mobilized to require the inclusion of chrysotile on the list of hazardous substances subject to restrictions which prevent the export of a product without the prior consent of the importing country, after information has been given on the dangerousness of the product. But "civil society" is hardly or not heard at the "conference of the parties", insofar as the decision depends upon the States.

In 2016, an amendment submitted by a group of 12 African countries was submitted to the Secretariat of the Rotterdam Convention, which sought to break the mandatory consensus law to allow the inclusion of a substance in Appendix III, if this inclusion was approved by a majority of 75% of the countries represented. The African Group requested the Parties to the Convention:

"... to make every effort to reach agreement on any proposed amendment to the Convention **by consensus**. If all efforts to reach consensus have been exhausted and no agreement has been reached, **the amendment**, as a last resort, **must be adopted by a three-fourths majority vote of the Parties present and shall be voted** upon in the meeting. "

A petition of 7,000 signatories from all over the world was submitted to the President of the Rotterdam Convention. Indonesian and Indian asbestos victims, in particular, testified publicly. An event organized by the Global Asbestos Action Alliance (<http://www.gban.net/>) was held outside the venue of the conference on 2 May, in which a delegation from the Asian Ban Asbestos Network participated.

In spite of this, on **May 3, 2017, the states meeting in Geneva failed to impose trade restrictions on white asbestos. Chrysotile asbestos will not be listed in Appendix III.** The largest producing, exporting and / or importing countries of chrysotile - Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Zimbabwe and Syria - blocked proposals for inclusion in the list of hazardous substances. Russia has even proposed to remove chrysotile from the list of chemicals proposed for inclusion in Appendix III, which is prohibited under the Convention. The secretariat of the Rotterdam Convention announced on Wednesday that the meeting "failed to reach a consensus to put asbestos on the list".

As for the amendment to article 22, it was not adopted either. Some delegates complained of the "misuse" of the consensus principle, stressing that without efforts to reach a compromise, it "can easily be used to block the agreement and weaken the Convention". One participant described the events of the day as an illustration of multilateralism's only goal being the "lowest common denominator".

"The only substances that can be listed (...) are those that no longer have commercial value," said Brian Kohler, the head of health, safety and sustainability at IndustriALL GlobalUnion, which represents more than 50 million workers in 140 countries. **The refusal to include chrysotile asbestos on the list of hazardous substances in Appendix III is a complete nonsense** <http://www.industrialunion.org/fr/industrial-manifeste-contre-lamiante-ce-28-avril>.

The associations Henri Pézerat and Ban Asbestos France can only be indignant at the cynicism of the states that still support a deadly industry, this year again, while the victims of asbestos are now counted by millions. The struggle of the international Ban Asbestos Network will continue to obtain a global ban on asbestos.

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