

In reply please quote:

Circular N° 7 (2006)

To all affiliated organisations

To all Global Union Federations

For information:

To all Executive Board Members

ELS/LR/ls

10 February 2006

Dear Friends,

Global Unions 'World Asbestos Ban' Campaign Update

I am writing to bring you up to date on the progress of our work regarding the Global Union Asbestos Ban Campaign and to request your further engagement on specific issues for:

- Following up on last June's asbestos campaign launch and broadening our roster of national and sector contact points,
- Building support for the newly adopted ICFTU asbestos resolution,
- Receiving information from you to enrich our priorities and strategies,
- Identifying concrete action points for implementing the campaign.

A. Background and History

In June 2005 Global Unions kicked off its campaign for a world ban of asbestos at the ILO conference special side-event in Geneva. For the programme and outcome of the event see: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpl_7b.EN.pdf

The launch was marked by the issuing of letters to Government, employer and trade union representatives of all countries attending the ILO Conference, requesting that they become involved in the ban asbestos campaign in some fashion. The content of the letters differed according to country groupings, based on a special analysis of country-by-country asbestos profiles produced for this purpose.

- *Country cluster 1a and 1b* for countries that have already banned or are expected to ban asbestos - 1a countries no longer import or export asbestos, while 1b countries still do;
- *Country cluster 2*: Countries that have not banned asbestos and show no record of trading in asbestos. However, the existence and use of asbestos in these countries has been documented or is highly suspected;

- *Country cluster 3a and 3b:* Countries that have not banned asbestos but either import or export it in varying degrees. 3a countries are the heaviest users, compared to 3b.

These country letters and country clusters are fully explained in:

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_7.EN.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_7.FR.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_7.SP.pdf

The country letters also requested that recipient organisations identify at least one person that would serve as a contact point with ICFTU for the follow up to the campaign (see Appendix B of the above).

At the same time, letters were written to ICFTU affiliates and the Global Union Federations, providing copies of the ILO-delivered letters and requesting that you follow up with your national government to obtain a reply, or alternatively to provide us with a short assessment of the existing situation in your country concerning issues raised in the letter.

In addition the ICFTU thrice issued a draft asbestos resolution for comment, which was then adopted by the 124th ICFTU Executive Board (Hong Kong, December 2005) and is attached. See:

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_7a.EN.pdf

Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_7a.FR.pdf

Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_7a.SP.pdf

As part of our initial follow up to the ILO activities last June, separate meetings took place in September and October regarding the campaign with ILO Safe Work, the IFBWW, the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA), the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH). A small follow up consultation meeting was held in Brussels at the end of October with the ETUC, WFPHA and some affiliates. In addition some participants who attended the UNEP Trade Union Assembly in Kenya (see below #C.c.) and are involved in asbestos issues attended a short briefing session and provided ideas for further planning. Together, these meetings helped provide some initial feedback on the progress of work and on possible priorities for the unfolding of the campaign, at least for the next six months.

B. Overview of Progress and Follow Up

Contact points and electronic communications. Trade unions or other organisations from the following country clusters have named campaign contact points, which have been added as participants to a new electronic forum for this purpose, as follows:

Cluster #1: Trade unions from Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Italy, Japan, Malta, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, as well as the Government of Belgium;

Cluster #2: Trade unions from Togo;

Cluster #3: Trade unions from Bangladesh, Mexico, Philippines, United States, Vietnam and Zimbabwe, as well as the governments of Brazil and Liberia.

Global or Sector bodies: ASBAN, BWI, ETUC, ICEM, IFJ, ILO, IMF, ICOH, ITGLWF, IUF, WFPHA, and WHO.

Those trade union bodies that have not named a contact point yet are urged to do so as soon as possible, since communication through the new forum has already begun. Please note that the new forum will include trade union and other group contact points that

join our campaign. Such contact names would serve as a basis for creating an ad-hoc coalition working group to provide guidance for the campaign.

C. The ICFTU Adopted Resolution and Follow Up

We would like the adopted ICFTU resolution mentioned above to become the basis of your initial organisation and planning. You will see that the resolution contains three components:

a) The Resolution Calls on Governments and social partners to support the ban:

Trade union and other bodies are urged to adopt this or a similar resolution and to establish their own asbestos ban policy. A resolution should also be used as a basis for creating dialogue with groups beyond the trade union community. Please tell us if you or others establish an asbestos ban policy, as your names will be publicly posted and publicised. For instance, besides the ICFTU and some GUFs the following organisations have so far confirmed joining our campaign:

- *The International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH)*, the major international professional organization of Physicians and Nurses in occupational health,
- *The International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE)*, an advocacy group representing physicians throughout Europe, Latin America, North America, Africa and Asia,
- *The World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA)*, representing public health professionals in some 60 countries.

Adopting an asbestos ban resolution or policy applies to trade unions in all countries, since asbestos stocks still exist everywhere in some fashion and must be handled and disposed of. Moreover, it is in the interest of trade unions in every country to support the banning of any 'international' traffic of asbestos, since finished products that result from such traffic make their way into global consumption markets, and remain undetected. Also, many of countries that have banned asbestos still continue to import or export the product, as effective transition to non-asbestos uses is a long term process.

A number of affiliates have undertaken follow up to the trade union letter to governments delivered at the ILO last June. So far, replies to affiliates from governments have been received from Denmark and Singapore only, signalling how much is still to be done in this regard. Any action on your part to obtain a formal reply from your government about its plans for asbestos would be appreciated. Alternatively, you might consider providing your own short assessment to us, as noted above, as to the current status of your government's policy with respect to the banning of asbestos.

b) The Resolution Calls on the International Labour Organisation to undertake specific action: Any communication from the constituents of ILO member States to the ILO itself about the need for a ban and concerning the measures described in the resolution is strongly encouraged.

At the coming ILO Conference this June worker, employer and trade union representatives will be in Geneva to finish negotiating a new promotional instrument for occupational health and safety. To coincide with this activity, we would once again circulate a special communication about our campaign to the various ILO constituent representatives. Whatever you do now to obtain the support of your government or employer representatives for the measures called for in our resolution would make a considerable difference to the outcomes of our efforts in June.

c) The Resolution calls on workers' and employer's organisations to engage in specific actions: Concrete actions at all levels should be undertaken to raise awareness about asbestos and its impacts and our global asbestos ban campaign, and these should be reported to us and information disseminated through the new electronic forum. Whatever you can do to coordinate your activities with those we have planned at the international level would make our action more effective. It is our aim to bring our asbestos ban to the attention of as many international bodies and arenas as possible. Besides the ILO in June, some of our activities already undertaken or to be undertaken include:

- **UNEP:** The recent 15-17 January UNEP Trade Union Assembly on Labour and Environment. See the adopted resolution (paragraphs 1.j. and 2.k.):
English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.EN.pdf
Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.FR.pdf
Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_6d.SP.pdf
- **SAICM:** at the 4-7 February meeting of the Strategic Approach for International Chemicals Management (SAICM) in Dubai, trade unions argued for the recognition of an asbestos ban;
- **OECD:** At the 1-3 March Ministerial meeting of the Environment Policy Committee (EPOC) in Paris the asbestos issue will be brought up as part of the discussions on the OECD Environmental Strategy;
- **28 April, International Commemoration Day (ICD) for Dead and Injured Workers** will this year include asbestos as a main theme for action. A separate circular will soon be issued pertaining to ICD and its treatment of the asbestos issue. Moreover, we invite you to consider planning your asbestos-related activities now or scheduling to report these in time for 28 April;
- **UN-CSD:** At the 1-12 May Meeting of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in New York trade unions will bring up the issue as part of the thematic discussions related to industrial development. See the trade union submission at part C.28.d:
Arabic: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_4h.AR.pdf
Chinese: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_4h.CH.pdf
English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_4h.EN.pdf
Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_4h.FR.pdf
Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_4h.SP.pdf
Russian: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpO_4h.RU.pdf
- **UN-WHO:** At the 22-26 May World Health Assembly in Geneva, trade unions will attempt to raise the issue of an asbestos ban with government Health Ministers, and a special kit will be distributed for this purpose. More information on this will be circulated through our asbestos ban electronic forum (see above).

D. Asbestos Country Profiling and a call for Information from YOU

The overall global union strategy for asbestos is supported by ongoing publicly available country-by-country profiles on asbestos, which are available at:

English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_6.EN.pdf
Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_6.FR.pdf
Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_6.SP.pdf

These contain basic information on asbestos for each country.

For the purposes of the campaign a shorter and more strategic internal campaign document is currently being produced. For this purpose we would like to receive from you the following types of information, for:

- *All countries*: data on the current uses of asbestos in your country, i.e. asbestos that does not show up in export/import statistics but is contained in products for sale, e.g. in asbestos cement (especially construction), machinery and car manufacturing, or waste processes and other processes. We would like to place some emphasis on the protection of workers still using asbestos and on issues related to compensation for injury suffered by these workers,
- *All countries*: nationally-based death and injury statistics due to asbestos. Currently, we only have limited estimated figures,
- *Country clusters #2 and #3*, your assessments of the current possibilities of your government moving toward the banning of asbestos.

We would like to become familiar with any educational materials your union has produced in any language on asbestos (a list only and not original materials), as these will eventually be incorporated into our index of available resource materials.

ILO Safe Work will be approached to help develop a very basic awareness raising process for trade union leaders about asbestos and its dangers. The WFPHA has agreed to produce a simple PowerPoint display that could be massively circulated. In the meantime please be aware that the WHO Occupational Health Collaborating Centres (if there is one in your country) are in a position to provide information and educational materials on asbestos related diseases. In addition, contacting your local ILO/WHO representatives to request aid in education about health effects of asbestos and silica as part of the joint ILO-WHO project on silica and asbestos related diseases might help provide you with additional resources.

We would like to hear from you regarding your activities on asbestos and about the progress of your work in your countries or sector. This information will be incorporated in upcoming versions of the country profiles. For further information, please contact Lucien Royer at royer@tuac.org

I look forward to working with you to implement the ICFTU congress resolution for a global asbestos ban.

Yours sincerely,



General Secretary



INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Hong Kong, 9-10 December 2005

RESOLUTION
ON
GLOBAL ASBESTOS BAN
ADOPTED 10 DECEMBER 2005

The ICFTU Executive Board, at its 124th meeting held in Hong Kong on 9-10 December 2005:

Considering That:

- Over 100,000 workers die every year from diseases caused by exposure to asbestos;
- All forms of asbestos, including chrysotile, are classified as known human carcinogens by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and by the International Programme for Chemical Safety; A number of less hazardous alternatives exist for all uses of asbestos;

And Considering That:

In December 2004 the ICFTU World Congress instructed its member bodies, regional organisations, Global Union partners and affiliates, to *“campaign for a total world ban on the use and commercialisation of asbestos; promote ratification of relevant ILO Conventions; work with affiliates to apply pressure on national governments to cease the further use of asbestos; ensure proper, strengthened, safeguards to protect workers and communities that are or will be exposed to asbestos products; and implement employment transition programmes for workers displaced by the banning of asbestos, including economic support for regions that are particularly affected”*;

The ICFTU Executive Board Calls on Governments and Social Partners To Support:

- National bans and a global ban of asbestos and the promotion of alternatives, with support also for the activities of trade unions in each country to promote such bans;
- The improved protection of workers against asbestos exposure and as a first step, the ratification and implementation of ILO Convention No. 162, the Safety in the Use of Asbestos Convention, along with its accompanying Recommendation No. 172, as a minimum standard;
- The establishment of programmes to promote the trade of non-asbestos materials;
- Programmes which offset employment losses due to asbestos bans by developing positive employment transition plans, in concert with the ILO *Employment Policy Convention* No.122 and its accompanying Recommendation R No. 122, along with the ILO Resolution on the *Social and Economic Consequences of Preventative Action*;

- Effective job creation, retraining and compensation measures through financially supported programmes aimed, for example, at removing and eliminating asbestos, promoting alternatives and improving public sector functions for inspections, monitoring and regulation, etc;
- The institution of effective measures, along with the ratification of relevant ILO Conventions to care for asbestos victims and ensure decent compensation.

The ICFTU Executive Board Calls on the International Labour Organisation to:

- Adopt health-based policies in favour of the elimination of the use of all forms of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials, and to improve the ratification and implementation of ILO instruments that relate to such policies;
- Encourage Member States to ratify and implement the provisions of ILO Convention No. 162, its accompanying Recommendation No. 172 and Convention No. 122;
- Undertake a review to better understand the factors for non-ratification of the ILO Convention No. 162 and the lack of implementation of its accompanying Recommendation and to provide advice to the Governing Body for a course remedial actions;
- Resolve to promote a global ban on the production, import, export and use of asbestos;
- Assist Member States and regions in drawing up national policies and programmes for the management, control and elimination of asbestos from the working and community environment and for necessary employment transition measures;
- Work more closely within the United Nations family, and particularly with the WHO to raise awareness about the dangers of asbestos.

The ICFTU Executive Board Calls on Workers' and Employers' Organisations to:

- Initiate actions and programmes leading to a ban on future use of asbestos in all of its forms;
- Engage in actions, especially at the national level, to convince governments to adopt and promote asbestos bans and to develop Just Employment transition measures;
- Support and foster the development of negotiations between worker and employer organisations through collective bargaining or other means to ban the use of asbestos at the workplace and to promote employment transition;
- Establish health and safety programmes and effective regulation (including effective licensing, quality assessment and sufficient inspection by public authorities) focussed on the occupational groups most at risk, namely those required to work, in existing building and infrastructures, with asbestos in repair, maintenance, refurbishment, demolition, removal and ship-stripping;
- Ensure that those responsible for the manufacture and sale of asbestos do not avoid any legal responsibilities to the individuals who have been injured by the use of their products.