

Press Release

Urgent need for banning asbestos in Indonesia to avoid large increases in lung cancer rates and other asbestos related diseases in coming decades - says Canadian Health Professor'

Jakarta Indonesia 25-28 July 2017

In meetings and workshops with trade unions, asbestos disease sufferers, Doctors and other health professionals, academics, media, medical students and representatives of Ministry of Manpower and Ministry of Health over three days last week, a clear message was delivered by Proff. Yv Bonnier Viger from Laval University in Quebec Canada.

'Based on experience of Canada, Australia, Japan, Korea, EU, USA and many other countries currently battling the high health, economic and environment cost of previous use of chrysotile, Indonesia can expect to pay a very high price in coming decades by continuing to allow use of asbestos. Indonesia should consider a ban on chrysotile as soon as possible' he said

Professor Yv explained "International evidence on the carcinogenic nature of chrysotile is overwhelming and indisputable among independent scientists, medical specialists and researchers the world over, including from UN agencies WHO and ILO. I hope the Canadian experience is timely to hear about in Indonesia as Canada has also recently joined many other countries in announcing a ban on asbestos'.

Most countries have stopped using asbestos

'Currently most countries in the world either don't use asbestos or have formally banned it. That's around 124 countries. Only 25 countries still use more than 1000 tonnes per year. Only 7 countries use more than 50,000 tonnes per year – including Indonesia.

All those other countries ban or don't use, or use very small amounts for a simple reason. This is because of the cancer risks from exposure to this fibre and the readily available substitutes of similar quality and price,' he said.

Indonesia is one of the few countries still consuming such large quantities of this deadly asbestos fibre and this is very worrying in terms of future cancer rates that can be expected. It's even more dangerous given that Indonesia is the second biggest tobacco market in the world. Given the high smoking rates in Indonesia and the clear evidence cancer risk are multiplied sharply with both exposure to smoking and to asbestos fibres, this is an urgent problem for public health in Indonesia' he said.

Smoking and asbestos exposure means a 28 times higher risk of lung cancer

'If you smoke its well-known you have 5 or 6 times greater risk of lung cancer. If you are exposed to asbestos fibre it's a slightly higher risk of contracting lung cancer. But both together – the risk can be 28 times or higher, than if you were not exposed to either' he said

Asbestos related diseases in Indonesia

M. Darisman, the coordinator of INABAN added, "From last year research, we found 10 out of 20 workers and former workers diagnosed with asbestos related disease. This number is just the tip of iceberg of asbestos related diseases problem in Indonesia. Indonesia will soon face an ARD boom. On the ground, the asbestos industries keep spreading lies that chrysotile is safe. This tour is our way to clear the lies"

Phillip Hazelton Campaign Coordinator for Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA commented 'Australia is now suffering from the enormous health, economic and environmental cost of our past use of asbestos. We are here in Indonesia to share lessons learnt from Australia and the rest of the world'.

'International modelling of disease burden, based on the experience of dozens of countries, shows clear and definitive correlation between the amounts of chrysotile asbestos consumed in a country and increased lung cancer rates and mesothelioma cancer rates 20-40 years later. Indonesia faces a big increase in cancer cases and heavy economic and health burden if it does not ban' he said.

'Some global burden of disease estimates suggest that at consumption levels of 120,000 tonnes per year of chrysotile, Indonesia can expect up to 700 mesothelioma cases per year and around 4,000 total cancers per year in coming decades from exposure to asbestos. These deaths are greatly reduced if consumption is stopped' he said.

In Indonesia the speaking tour was organised by INABAN, a network made up of concerned NGO's, trade unions, legal and medical professionals working to raise awareness to the asbestos hazard to the health of Indonesian workers, community and consumers.

Indonesia is the last stop in a 5 country speaking tour for Professor Yv supported by Union Aid Abroad APHEDA, the Australian government and a wide range of international organisations from Australia, Asia, North America and Europe.

The 5 country tour updated governments trade unions, employers, NGOs and media on latest research clear evidenced based understanding on asbestos related diseases. Some countries were joined by additional international experts such as Peter Tighe CEO of the Australian government's Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA), ASEA Director Nick Miller, Mr Sugio Furuya, General Secretary, Japan International Center for Occupational Safety and Health (JICOSH) and Phillip Hazelton Coordinator of the Program to Eliminate Asbestos related diseases Union Aid Abroad APHEDA.

The 5 country speaking tour was also supported by the Australian Government Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA) and a range of international organisations including Right On Canada, International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS), Asia Ban Asbestos Network (ABAN), Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) and Solidar Suisse.

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