



# OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH NETWORK OF INDIA

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## **Indian Ban Asbestos Network (I-BAN) Established**

On December 16, 2017 civil society and trade unions in India came together creating an important milestone in the occupational and environmental health rights based work in India by establishing the Indian Ban Asbestos Network (IBAN) in New Delhi. The establishment of the Indian Ban Asbestos Network is an unprecedented step towards the creation of asbestos free workplace and society. The network was formed with a clear goal of getting all forms of asbestos banned in India as the first step towards the elimination of the asbestos related diseases in India. The network was founded by 16 organisations consisting of Trade Unions, NGOs, Victims organisations and individual Scientists, Doctors and Lawyers. The network agreed to focus on key objectives of preparing a detailed position paper highlighting the use of Asbestos in India and the harm it has caused, to launch an information and education campaign about the hazards of Asbestos especially among the workers engaged in asbestos product manufacturing, construction, mining and ship breaking. The network also agreed to engage with the relevant authorities in India to ensure all imports of Asbestos is stopped and asbestos product manufacturing is converted into non-asbestos (alternative material) products and just transition is ensured for existing workers working in these hazardous industries. Recognising the ultimate price that victims have paid with their health by working with this carcinogen, the network recognises the key role of Victims in the network and would work towards identification and diagnosis of the victims across India to ensure just compensation for them. The IBAN Network will also work actively towards formation of asbestos victims' organisations in India.

The network was formed after two days of discussions in a meeting "India Beyond Asbestos - Issues and Strategies" held in New Delhi from December 15 to 16, 2017. The meeting was organised jointly by the Occupational and Environmental Health Network of India (OEHNI) and the Building and Woodworkers International (BWI) to discuss and debate the issues concerning asbestos and come up with clear strategy to push for a ban of asbestos in India. The meeting was attended by more than 50 participants representing 12 Indian States and International Organisations from the Asia Pacific region including the Asian Ban Asbestos Network (ABAN), Asia Monitor Resource Network (AMRC), Solidar Suisse and Union Aid Abroad APHEDA . Meeting was attended by asbestos victims, representatives of national trade unions, global union federations, voluntary organizations, scientists, medical professionals, academicians and lawyers. They came together to take stock of the situation in India and develop recommendations for Government, industry, workers, consumers and general population to stop the use of asbestos and prevent asbestos related diseases.

Speaking in the meeting, Mr.R.C.Khuntia, Chairman of BWI/Indian Affiliates Council acknowledged the need to Ban all forms of asbestos in India and also offered to take a petition from the group to the parliament in the coming winter session. Mrs. Nirmala Gurung, retired teacher of school established by Eternit in Kymore, Madhya Pradesh said, how she was exposed to asbestos from dust flying from the dump yard beside the school and got asbestosis, an incurable lung diseases.

India is one of the world's largest importers of asbestos. In 2015, it imported over 370,000 tones of asbestos, with the trade value totalling over \$239 million. India's share of global consumption of asbestos has been steadily rising since 1960, when it accounted for a little over 1% of global



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consumption of asbestos, but by 2003 its share had risen to 9.11%. Today, it is Asia's second largest consumer of asbestos after China.<sup>1</sup>

There is no evidence for any safe threshold of exposure for the carcinogenic effect of asbestos. Increased risks have been observed in populations exposed to very low levels. WHO considers the most effective way to eliminate asbestos related diseases is to stop using all types of asbestos. Over 70 countries in the world have either completely banned all types of asbestos use, import, trade, mining, manufacturing and export or announced their intention to do so. Canada will ban mining and export from 2018. And now Brazil Supreme Court has passed order to ban asbestos. Brazil is major exporter of asbestos. This order has changed the global scenario and will have lasting impact on international trade of this toxic material. The Government of India however, have so far, only protected the asbestos industry.

Mr. Sugio Furuya, Coordinator of Asian Ban Asbestos Network presented an update on global action on asbestos. He emphasised that global trade of asbestos is shrinking fast. Senior Occupational Health Specialist Mr.Kawakami represented ILO at this meeting who explained ILO convention on Asbestos. Representative from Nepal explained challenges faced by the country in post-ban period in Nepal. He explained how asbestos industry in India is trying to push asbestos containing material in Nepal in spite of ban. Australia Union Aid abroad representative gave overview of the ban asbestos networks formed in different Asia-pacific countries. BWI and IndustriAll representatives talked of the efforts done by them to get asbestos banned. Sanjiv Pandita narrated experience of Rotterdam Convention where Indian Government is consistently thwarting efforts to get Chrysotile included in PIC list. One participant gave information on use of asbestos in Indian public sector units including railways.

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<sup>1</sup> National Asbestos Profile, P.15.