



PRESS RELEASE

Call for urgent action to ban asbestos in Malaysia

Petaling Jaya, 20 November 2024: The Asian Ban Asbestos Network (A-BAN) including organizations in Malaysia who have gathered here for the A-BAN South East Asia Conference-Building Momentum: Banning Asbestos in Southeast Asia - calls on the Malaysian government to urgently impose an outright ban on all types of asbestos products being manufactured in the country and halt any further imports of chrysotile asbestos fibre. The network also calls for an urgent phasing out of consumer products containing asbestos.

Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring silicate minerals composed of long, thin fibres, with different shapes and colours. The WHO, ILO have advised very clearly there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos fibre. Asbestos is classified as a Group I carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). Further, there is clear and unequivocal evidence of cancer and other disease risks associated with the continued use of asbestos. This fibre alone is the cause of 70% of global occupational cancers according to the ILO.

We are deeply concerned that workers continue to face serious risks from asbestos exposure, particularly in asbestos removal, demolition, building maintenance, ship-breaking and waste handling activities. We urge the Malaysian Government to heed clear advice from the World Health Organisation that “Asbestos-related diseases can be prevented and the most efficient way to prevent them is to stop the use of all forms of asbestos to prevent exposure.” (WHO Factsheet Asbestos September 2024)

“The use of asbestos in Malaysia must be banned to eliminate the disease burden and the deaths caused by exposure to asbestos. Many countries have banned or are phasing out asbestos due to public health concerns and liabilities associated with asbestos. All diseases and deaths related to asbestos are entirely preventable and safer substitutes for asbestos do exist. Malaysia should have banned asbestos a long time ago, and a decision to ban will not impact the economy, in fact it will be a boon to the country by way of economic cost. Hence, we call on the government to take decisive action to ban asbestos,” said Mohideen Abdul Kaveri, President of Consumers’ Association of Penang.

Quote by

Sugio Furaya, “Its time to stop unnecessary deaths of workers and consumers from chrysotile asbestos. We urge Malaysia and other countries in our region to join with those that are moving to protect their people, the economy and the environment and ban import and use of all types of asbestos.

We call on Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia to follow WHO and ILO advice to protect workers and the public from this deadly substance that have been banned in more than 70 countries around the world and for which safer substitute materials are readily available.”

Phillip Hazelton Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA

“Australia still is suffering a terrible cost of our past use of chrysotile asbestos, with over 4,000 deaths annually from asbestos exposure, 20 years after we banned its use. Globally over 200,000 workers are dying every year from asbestos exposure. We commend the Malaysian Government for agreeing to cooperate with other countries in the region to transition to safer non-asbestos alternatives to asbestos, through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework Agreement. It’s past time to act

Apolinar Tolentino –Building and Wood Worker International (BWI)

We welcome the Cambodian Governments announcement that it will ban asbestos in 2025 as well as the move by the Asia Development Bank (ADB) to introduce a ban on asbestos containing materials in 2025 in all their future investments. We also note that in 2024 the Supreme Court of Indonesia has mandated labelling of all asbestos materials with a health warning, the USA has announced a full ban on asbestos. and the Malaysian Government has already agreed to cooperate with other countries in the region to transition to safer non-asbestos alternatives to asbestos, through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework Agreement. It’s past time to act.

David Arul, General Secretary, Electronic Industry Employees Union Northern Region (EIEUNR)

The Electronic Industry Employees Union Northern Region (EIEUNR) is calling for an urgent and complete ban of asbestos in all industries Asbestos, a highly hazardous material linked to deadly diseases such as lung cancer, mesothelioma, and asbestosis, continue to endanger the health and lives of Malaysian workers and the public.

Despite global evidence confirming asbestos’ severe health risks, its usage persists in several Malaysian industries, exposing countless workers to preventable harm. EIEUNR strongly urges the Malaysian government to prioritise workers’ safety by implementing an immediate nationwide ban on asbestos.

ANNEX

Asbestos: Latest development

2023.06.05 **Cambodia** Government announces to ban the use of asbestos in 2025
http://www.ibasecretariat.org/abs_archive_news.php?sel=c&c_val=Cambodia

2023.11.15 **IPEF** (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity) agreement relating to supply chain resilience (pillar II) <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100581548.pdf>

"12. The Parties intend to cooperate to provide technical assistance and capacity building to prevent asbestos-related diseases and to promote transition from the use of asbestos to safer alternative

products in IPEF supply chains."

2024.02.06 UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) opens a website "Asbestos" based on its paper presented to 6th UNEA.

<https://www.unep.org/topics/chemicals-and-pollution-action/pollution-and-health/asbestos>

"Recommended options for management of asbestos suggested to guide relevant stakeholders and others", the first option is "Reinforcing legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms to bolster the elimination asbestos-related diseases by stopping the use of all types of asbestos and managing asbestos risks across its entire life cycle."

2024.3.18 USA finalizes ban on ongoing uses of asbestos to protect people from cancer

<https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/biden-harris-administration-finalizes-ban-ongoing-uses-asbestos-protect-people-cancer>

2024.03.19 Indonesia Supreme Court decision requiring labeling to all asbestos containing products and a retaliatory lawsuit against ban asbestos campaigner by local asbestos industry

<https://www.apheda.org.au/corporate-bullies-asbestos-industry-in-new-bid-to-sabotage-public-health-and-safety-in-indonesia/>

2024.08.29 ATUC (ASEAN Trade Union Council) Empowering Trade Unions in ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience for Migrant Workers Conference (in Laos) Statement

<https://www.apheda.org.au/migrant-workers-the-fight-against-asbestos-exposure/>

"ASEAN TUC, national trade unions, and other stakeholders will work with APHEDA to expand the 'Asbestos, Not Here, Not Anywhere' campaign into a regional initiative to ban asbestos and protect all workers, including migrant workers, from the occupational hazards associated with asbestos exposure."

2024.09.19-21 ACSC/APF 2024 (ASEAN Civil Society Conference / ASEAN People Forum (in Dili, Timor-Leste), Side event CS4 + WS3: Occupational health and the campaign to ban asbestos within SE Asia and Resolution - coming soon!? <https://acsc-apf.org/>

2024.09.27 ADB (Asian Development Bank) releases 2nd draft of revised Prohibited Investment Activities as a part of its Environment and Social Framework

<https://www.adb.org/who-we-are/safeguards/safeguard-policy-review/revised-policy>

"(viii) production of, or trade in, or use of asbestos fibers;13

13 This does not apply to projects involving disposal of asbestos, provided a suitable asbestos management plan is adopted for such disposal. " ABAN and others has sent a letter to ADB.