



Munich/Utrecht/Annemasse

04.04.2010

To: Russian Asbestos Industry Association, regarding your letter concerning Parma Ministerial Conference, received 2.03.2010

Dear Mr. Ivanov,

We thank you for your letter. We are very sorry that you continue to pretend that your asbestos, from Russia, is safe and that there is no need for a ban.

Our work is based on the international scientific conclusions of WHO and IARC and the experience of more than 45 countries that have taken measures to eliminate asbestos-related diseases.

We have bought several samples of chrysotile asbestos used in Russia and the EECCA region, and tested them in a certified laboratory, which prove that your chrysotile asbestos fibres has the same diameter and length as in the rest of the world, which make them so deadly.

Most of workers in the asbestos and construction sector, and the general public, in the EECCA region, do not know how dangerous this material is and use it without any protection, since they were told that "their" asbestos is different and safe.

We see children playing on heaps of broken chrysotile asbestos slates, we see schools and playgrounds build with asbestos containing material. Parents do not know that their children risk to develop a deadly disease.

The chrysotile asbestos used in the EECCA region is a great health hazard, and is and will lead to many deaths.

However, there is a severe lack of data on asbestos related diseases in many EECCA countries. No cancer or occupational health registers exist. Many countries do not have national programs to eliminate asbestos related diseases, even though WHO and ILO provide support.

We have also visited several laboratories in EECCA countries and came to the conclusion that of those visited, none was correctly equipped to measure asbestos in the air, so as to assess the exposure of workers, residents and school children and the related health effects.

In the EU, more than 400,000 people will die from exposure to asbestos, most of this, chrysotile asbestos. There is no safe limit of exposure to chrysotile asbestos, exposure is proven to be linked to asbestosis, mesothelioma, and cancers of the lung, the larynx and the ovaries.

We as a NGO working on women, children and environment are highly concerned, since women and

Picture of sample 4377: chrysotile asbestos



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children suffer from asbestos related diseases, too. For instance, wives of asbestos workers are exposed by washing their husbands working-clothes. In the UK 175 cases of asbestos related deaths of teachers – many women – have been proven.

Even when playing in playgrounds children can be exposed to asbestos. The disease only develops many years later. A first court-case has been won by an asbestos victim who was exposed to asbestos dust whilst playing near an asbestos factory when she was a child.

Therefore, as a network of over 100 women and environment organisations in over 40 countries, it is our role to speak up for the vulnerable, for children, for women, and in this case, also for the uninformed general public and construction workers in the EECCA region.

We believe it is very unethical that your industry association is giving wrong information about the health risks of chrysotile asbestos.

We call on your industry to provide full information to the users of asbestos about its health hazards, instead of denying that they exist.

Furthermore, as many years of unsuccessful efforts by the asbestos industry have shown, there is no safe means of using chrysotile asbestos.

As there are many substitutes for asbestos on the market, including many locally produced building materials, **there is only one ethical step to be taken, eliminate all the unnecessary asbestos death, by phasing out asbestos as fast as possible**, starting with a ban of asbestos use in schools and kindergartens.

We see it as a sign of weakness of arguments from your part, that you try to make our organisation and others, which stand up for the health of children and women, look as if we are infiltrators for other countries economic interests (quoting from your letter “lobbying the interests of producers of asbestos substitutes”). Of course we do promote the use of asbestos substitutes, and through many of our projects with local communities in the EECCA region, we are helping local businesses to develop safe materials for construction of e.g. schools.

We understand a transition away from asbestos will require reprofiling of the industry and the workforce and that jobs and employment should be protected. **We therefore call on the Russian government to support a just transition scheme for asbestos workers**, to stimulate the development of the alternative economic activities in the areas affected by asbestos mining and to development of new skills among asbestos workers allowing them to find new jobs in workplaces that will not be harmful for their health.

We are glad to cooperate with any government or scientific or citizens organisation which wants to understand how they are exposed to chrysotile asbestos, what their health risks is, and how asbestos related diseases can be eliminated.

I look forward to further discussing with you in Parma,
Yours sincerely



Sascha Gabizon
Executive Director
WECF

