

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

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Governments Urged To Join World 'Asbestos Ban' Trade Unions Call For Stop To Century-Long Carnage

Brussels, 7 June 2005 (ICFTU OnLine) Global Unions will kick off a world campaign to ban the use of asbestos on 8 June in Geneva, where some 4,000 worker, employer and government representatives from around the world have gathered for the annual conference of the UN's 178-member International Labour Organization (ILO).

Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), will announce at a special event organised by Global Unions, the beginning of a country-by-country process that trade unions hope will bring an end to the death and destruction caused by asbestos, which continues to kill over 100,000 people per year throughout the world and inflicts suffering among millions more.

Global Unions have formally delivered a letter to every government attending the ILO Conference, asking them to become involved in nationally banning asbestos or in supporting a world ban on the commercialization and use of the product.

"We believe the evidence showing the dangers of asbestos to be irrefutable", Ryder told governments, emphasizing that all forms of asbestos cause asbestosis, a progressive fibrotic disease of the lungs.

"Asbestos is a threat to everyone, not just workers", Ryder said, "from children in schools, to young and old in private and public buildings where asbestos is present and to whole communities where it exists as a pollutant".

All asbestos can cause lung cancer, malignant mesothelioma and gastrointestinal cancers. It has been declared a proven human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organisation (WHO). Despite previous hopes that chrysotile asbestos might be safe, the preponderance of scientific evidence to date demonstrates that it too causes cancer, including lung cancer and mesothelioma.

"We will extend our appeal to employer, trade union and civil society organisations within every country to get involved in the ban, as a matter of urgency and human decency," said Ryder. Trade unions at the ILO met last week to plan campaign activities until this time next year, when they hope the ILO will agree to work toward an all-out asbestos ban.

If planned properly, Ryder said that employment impacts of the ban could be offset through positive employment transition. "We believe that an adequate roster of tools and instruments exists for any country to adequately deal with all aspects of asbestos transition, including the prevention of cancers, handling and banning of asbestos, promoting alternatives, as well as measuring and addressing social, employment and economic impacts," he stated.

Government representatives and ILO dignitaries will join trade union and health experts at the Kick-Off tomorrow. Ryder said that nearly 40 countries have already banned asbestos and nearly 80 more that still actively use asbestos will be called upon to stop such activities.

"I am convinced that with targeted action from all us in each country, we will have a measurable effect on the implementation of our policy and on the realisation of an effective world ban of asbestos", Ryder told ICFTU affiliates throughout the world in a letter sent to them last week

about the campaign.

A trade union profile of each country's status and performance relative to asbestos issues is available at:

http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpL_6.EN.pdf

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 233 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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