



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
«TRADE UNIONS & CHRYSOTILE»
(25-27 April, 2007, Moscow)

Appeal
of the participants of the International Conference “Trade Unions and Chrysotile”
to Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General of the World Health Organization
(Avenue Appia 20, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland)

Dear Dr. Margaret Chan,

We, participants of the International Conference “Trade Unions and Chrysotile”, trade union representatives from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Brazil, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, India, Kazakhstan, Canada, China, Columbia, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, Peru, Russia, Salvador, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and the Ukraine, have considered it necessary to turn to you for support of the position on a safe and responsible use of chrysotile in the world and on the opposition to a negative influence of the campaign for a global ban of chrysotile that may have a negative effect on the life of hundreds of millions of people in the world.

This appeal is to inform you about our concern about the recently published draft of the “WHO Policy on elimination of asbestos-related diseases”.

As workers’ representatives, we are greatly concerned about the fact that results of many recent studies of chrysotile and health, a current level of equipment and technology of production and use of chrysotile-containing products are neglected during the consideration of this problem by the World Health Organization.

We are perplexed and outraged by the fact that the above-mentioned draft of the “WHO Policy” was adopted hastily, without wide consultations and expert evaluations, without involvement of scientists whose research confirms the feasibility and expediency of a controlled use of chrysotile asbestos.

Such methods of decision making in relation to complicated medical issues shake faith in such a respected organization as the World Health Organization.

We insist that any matter should be considered in the WHO with participation of experts representing all interested parties.

We think that in the attempt to ban all types of asbestos including chrysotile in favor of asbestos substitutes the following is being neglected:

- truly important results of recent studies;
- current conditions of using chrysotile asbestos; and
- insufficient knowledge about substitutes.

In fact, this substitution has no grounds because the use of chrysotile substances does not guarantee safety. We also think that it is impossible to enforce a burdensome for the developing countries (due to additional expenses) substitution of chrysotile asbestos by other materials that have no obvious advantages for public health or the environment but are much more expensive.

We think that health and safety of workers and the society must be ensured by following reliable instructions and serious programs containing a detailed description of safe work practices. This refers to the use of both chrysotile-containing and substitute products and fibers.

As for chrysotile-containing products, the above-mentioned instructions have been developed during more than 100 years of its use and are well known, but this is not true for man-made fibers.

We maintain that announcements of 90,000 chrysotile-related deaths in the world made by the WHO Department of Public Health and the Environment are rather debatable and made without any consideration of differences in the potency of chrysotile and amphibole fibers, low levels of occupational and environmental exposure, and numerous data of recent studies.

We, chrysotile miners and millers, users of modern chrysotile-cement and chrysotile-containing friction products, assert that there is no excess risk of a disease or death at our enterprises, and we do not understand these frightening statements.

Hence, we demand that the WHO impartially considers recent scientific data on chrysotile.

We are sure that chrysotile must not be banned for the sake of health and social welfare of hundreds of millions of people in the world (especially in developing countries), who suffer and prematurely die from having no shelter and clean water. A wide use of low-cost chrysotile-cement products is necessary to resolve this problem.

We hope for an objective consideration of this appeal.