

**Construction Unions in the Asia-Pacific Region Call for a Ban on Asbestos**  
**Joint Statement for International Workers Memorial Day**

Every five minutes a worker dies due to deadly exposure from asbestos---a dangerous substance found in asbestos cement products used every day in the construction of pipes, tiles, roofing materials, sheets for partition walls, and in insulating materials. Although it is widely accepted and known to cause deadly respiratory diseases, including lung cancer, asbestosis and mesothelioma, countries such as Canada continue to aggressively export it, leaving hundreds of thousands of dead in the process.

We, the construction unions within the Asia-Pacific region and affiliates of the Building and Wood Workers International, a Global Union Federation representing workers in the construction and timber industries, denounce the continuous use of asbestos in the building industry. As we honour the hundred thousand people who die each year from exposure to asbestos, we call for a world-wide ban on asbestos and we ask the Canadian government to immediately stop exporting asbestos to our countries. We know first hand the dangers of asbestos because we are the workers who are in the front-line of danger every day from exposure to asbestos. It is us who build the homes, the schools, and the buildings which make up our community. Like all workers, we have the right to work in a decent, clean, and healthy environment.

“It does not take a rocket scientist to know the dangers of asbestos,” declared Arwin Villamil President of National Union of Building and Construction Workers. He continued, “We all know the dangers of asbestos, as medical experts and scientists have all provided ample evidence that clearly shows the dangers of asbestos. However, the Canadian government continues to ignore this proof.”

Gerard Seno, President of Associated Labor Unions of the Philippines agreed, “In continuing to export asbestos to developing countries, Canada is once again exploiting and abusing developing countries for its own profit. We are committed to ensuring that our workers are free from the harms of asbestos, as we have formed a network that will aggressively work towards a ban of asbestos in the Philippines.”

According to Nobuo Kawada, Chairman of Japanese Affiliates Council, BWI, “Japan is one of 40 countries that have banned the use of asbestos. We were one of many unions and organizations that supported this ban in Japan and today, we stand together with other brothers and sisters in BWI calling for similar bans in countries across the Asia-Pacific region.”

“Canada along with China, Russia, and Brazil are big producers and exporters of asbestos but the Canadian government is the only one that financially supports massive advertising campaigns in developing countries declaring that asbestos is safe,” stated Ken Wen Nan, President

of National Federation of Chinese Construction Workers Union.

According to Hanafiah Ahmad, President of the Union of Employees in Construction Industry of Malaysia., “Construction workers, like all workers, have the right to earn their livelihood and provide for their families without any worries about dying.” He continued, “The actions of the Canadian government are basically a tantamount to condemning workers to a lifetime of illness and of a sure death. This is unconscionable and unacceptable.”

“We join the BWI’s efforts in calling the Canadian government to stop supporting the production and exporting of asbestos,” stated Namkoong Hyun, President of the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions. He continued, “Recently, both the Department of Labour and the Department of Environment have recommended that all construction projects should no longer use asbestos contained materials. We welcome this measure as it is one step closer towards the government passing measures for a complete ban of asbestos in South Korea.”

According to F-KUI, asbestos is currently one of the construction materials being used in the reconstruction and rebuilding of communities in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, after the devastation of the tsunami. “Of course we welcome the support from the international community to rebuild our homes so that we can get on with our lives; however, this should not come with a cost, in this case our lives,” stated Mr. Mudhofir, Secretary General of F-KUI. After the tsunami, we want to rebuild and live rather than rebuild to only die from a slow and painful death because of asbestos.

On April 28, more than one hundred unions affiliated to the Building and Wood Workers International are planning a series of activities and actions ranging from rallies to educational workshops and seminars, to press conferences, to distribution of materials on the dangers of asbestos, to vigils commemorating workers who have died as a result of asbestos.

BWI will be also mobilizing our members to engage in peaceful demonstrations and petitions at Canadian Embassies and Consulates to convince the Canadian government to stop its aggressive marketing and promotion of asbestos in developing countries such as India, Zimbabwe, and Brazil. Anita Normark, BWI General Secretary stated, “Today’s exposures guarantee an epidemic lasting at least another generation, with the asbestos graveyards shifting from the developed to the developing world.”

We, who represent construction unions in the Asia-Pacific region and members of BWI will join these efforts. Every year thousands of workers die each year as a result of asbestos. The tragedy is that these deaths are preventable as there are safe alternatives to asbestos. However, due to the negligence and greed of asbestos producing companies, many thousands more will continue to die. We believe the time has come to put an end to this tragedy. On April 28 will make our voices heard through united actions and solidarity against the producers and exporters of asbestos.

**Signatory Unions**

Associated Construction and Informal Workers Union (Philippines)

Associated of Labor Unions, TEUP (Philippines).

Balikatan (Philippines)

BPWWU, KSPSI (Indonesia)

Construction Site General Workers Union, HKCTU (Hong Kong)

F-KUI, KSBSI (Indonesia)

Japanese Affiliates Council, BWI (Japan)

Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Union, KCTU (South Korea)

Mixer Truck Drivers Association, HKCTU (Hong Kong)

National Federation of Labor (Philippines)

National Union of Building and Construction Workers (Philippines)

National Federation of Chinese Construction Workers Union (Taiwan)

Union of Employees in Construction Industry (Malaysia)