

Asbestos must go

Over 400 delegates from 32 countries attended the Global Asbestos Congress in Brazil in September 2000. Delegates, including asbestos victims, trade unionists, academics, politicians and campaigners, welcomed the September 2000 World Trade Organisation decision that national asbestos bans are allowed under free trade rules (*Hazards* 71).

Conference speakers at the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS) organised event, however, called for justice for the individuals and communities affected by asbestos use and the slow death of asbestos trade, including those devastated by multinational companies operating in the developing world (see *Hazards*' 69 and 71).

The trade union delegation at the Congress, trade unionists from international, national and local organisations in Latin America, Asia, Africa, North America and Europe, expressed "their commitment to a global ban on the mining, manufacture, marketing and use of all forms of asbestos and related products."

A statement of nine key trade union demands for a fair and swift end to asbestos trade was agreed.

Asbestos ban: Trade unions should lobby their national governments to introduce a ban on asbestos, as part of an international move to ban asbestos throughout the world.

Protection of workers: Trade unions should lobby their governments to ratify, effectively apply and enforce ILO Convention 162 as a mini-

mum standard to protect workers who may be exposed to asbestos through their work. Trade unions should ensure that the best protection method to prevent exposure to asbestos fibres is available to workers who have to remove asbestos.

Awareness raising: Trade unions should develop and maintain a broad-based international campaign to educate workers, the union movement and the public about the risks of exposure to asbestos fibre and the measures to be taken to prevent ill-health and to secure a global ban on asbestos.

Alternatives: Trade unions should seek the replacement of asbestos with alternative substances that are less harmful to human health and the environment. Research should be promoted into technology to develop alternative substances to asbestos where that technology does not currently exist.

Information exchange: Trade unions in countries that manufacture and use asbestos substitutes should distribute technical information on the substitutes to sister unions in countries where those substitutes are not currently manufactured and used.

Just Transition: Where work-

ers may be displaced because of the introduction of an asbestos ban, trade unions should lobby for a Just Transition to protect the income, employment and welfare of those affected and their communities (see pages 18-19).

Legal action: Trade unions should seek through their legal systems to bring to justice those employers whose negligence has caused asbestos diseases and environmental damage to the community. The polluter must pay the remediation costs of any environmental damage done by their operations.

Compensation: Trade unions should seek appropriate and

prompt compensation for workers who suffer from asbestos related diseases.

Treatment: Trade unions should campaign to ensure that the victims of asbestos related disease will have access to appropriate medical treatment, support services and information.

Statement of Trade Unions on Banning Asbestos Worldwide.
Trade union delegation, Global Asbestos Congress, Osasco, 17-22 September 2000.

Support IBAS!

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photo: HEIN DU PLESSIS

ASBESTOS CONFERENCE-ADVANCE NOTICE The Hazards Campaign and the TUC are to hold an asbestos conference in early 2001. The main issue for discussion will be the implications for trade union safety reps of the new legal requirement on owners or tenants of properties to identify asbestos. Campaigning, removal, dumping, compensation and treatment will also be covered. Further details from: Asbestos Conference, London Hazards Centre, 213 Haverstock Hill, London NW3 4QP. See next issue of *Hazards* for full details.