

3rd Regional Conference on Asbestos

9-10 December 2025 | Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Conference Statement

We, the affiliates of the **International Trade Union Confederation - Asia Pacific (ITUC-Asia Pacific)**, **Building and Wood Workers' International**, and **Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA**, together with allied and partner organisations, met on 9–10 December 2025 at the ITUC-Asia Pacific's 3rd Regional Conference on Asbestos in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

We reaffirm that a healthy and safe workplace is a fundamental human right and a workers' right, and that as trade unions, we will continue to take action to ensure safe and healthy working environments as an integral part of decent work.

We reaffirm our support for the International Labour Organization (ILO) Resolution concerning asbestos (adopted at the 95th Session of the International Labour Conference, June 2006), which confirmed that the ILO Convention on Safety in the Use of Asbestos (C162) does not provide justification for the continued use of asbestos, including chrysotile asbestos. We note that workers are exposed to asbestos, including chrysotile asbestos, across its lifecycle from mining, production through to disposals and waste management.

We are concerned that over 80% of the current global consumption of 1.3 million tonnes of asbestos, is in Asia and 70% of all occupational linked cancers are due to asbestos exposure (WHO 2024). We condemn the fact that 211,000 workers around the world die each year due to occupational exposure to asbestos from diseases such as lung cancer, asbestosis, mesothelioma among others. We are deeply concerned that millions of workers — most of them now in developing countries in the Asia Pacific region — continue to be exposed to asbestos, resulting in unnecessary deaths and serious ill-health, despite the availability of safer alternative products. We are angry that the changing pattern of asbestos exposure will see Asia as the new leader in asbestos-related diseases (ARDs) in the coming decades.

We note the World Health Organisation's (WHO) advice that eliminating the use of chrysotile asbestos is the most effective means of protecting workers from asbestos exposure and preventing future asbestos related diseases (ARDs) and deaths, and confirm that the asbestos industry's arguments for the "safe use" of this deadly fibre are invalid.

We deplore the 20-year blocking of the listing of chrysotile asbestos onto the Rotterdam Convention by a small number Parties. This is despite recommendations to list chrysotile asbestos by the convention's chemical review committee and the support for listing of over 90% of Parties throughout this time.

In the spirit of solidarity and restoring democracy in Myanmar, the ITUC-Asia Pacific calls on its affiliates and the international trade union movement to uphold democratic integrity and prevent the junta from gaining legitimacy through these sham elections by taking the following actions:

We condemn asbestos producers and traders who actively undermine the Rotterdam Convention and manipulate its procedures to protect and promote commercial interests, intimidate health advocates and seek to deceive governments, at the expense of workers, public health and the environment.

We note recent positive progress on asbestos regulations and bans in the region, supported by trade unions and NGOs, including the Cambodian and Malaysian government announcements on plans to move to a complete ban of asbestos import and use, the Asian Development Bank's new policy to prohibit all asbestos containing materials (ACM) from use in new investments from January 2026, the Supreme Court of Indonesia's decision to mandate health warning labelling on asbestos containing materials in the construction sector and the agreement of 14 countries across the region to work together to transition to safer alternatives.

With this momentum, it is a moment to accelerate our efforts to eliminate the use of all forms of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials in our countries and globally, to ensure the health and safety of all workers, their families, and their communities.

Specific priority actions for affiliates and advocates should include:

1. Joining together in a trade union led regional asbestos action network for campaigning and sharing information to demand urgent transition to safer materials by those countries still importing asbestos and protecting workers from exposure from remaining asbestos materials in the built environment;
2. Campaigning for improved diagnosis and just compensation for workers and other victims of asbestos-related diseases;
3. Promoting independent evidence to workers and policymakers on the deadly health impacts of exposure to chrysotile asbestos and all other asbestos types;
4. Condemning the asbestos industry's legal, intimidatory and misinformation tactics in seeking to delay regulation in countries in the Asia Pacific still using this deadly material;
5. Working on continuing to raise public awareness of occupational health and safety issues as part of broader organising strategies;
6. Seeking regional forums such as ASEAN and SAARC to take up the issue of asbestos transition and bans and management of remaining asbestos in the built environment to protect workers from asbestos related diseases; and
7. Lobbying International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to have a robust safeguards and prohibition of use of asbestos in all projects.

We call on our governments:

1. To urgently follow the ADB and 72 countries globally who have already banned all types of asbestos and the clear advice of the WHO and the ILO that the most effective means to stop exposure and asbestos-related diseases is to cease using all types of asbestos, including chrysotile, as soon as possible;

2. To ratify the ILO Convention C162 and C155 while moving toward eliminating the use of asbestos, taking immediate steps to reduce the risk of exposure to asbestos fibres among workers and communities, and developing systems for the safe removal and disposal of asbestos waste;
3. To support reforms to the Rotterdam Convention's listing procedure at COP13 in 2027, to defeat the corporate capture of this convention's system of listing chemicals and demanding the listing of long blocked recommended chemicals such as chrysotile asbestos;
4. To ensure a Just Transition to asbestos-free alternatives, ensuring that workers' livelihoods are protected throughout this transition; and
5. To raise the issue in regional forums such as ASEAN and SAARC as a matter of urgency.