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ITUC-Asia Pacific
INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION - ASIA PACIFIC

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CONFERENCE STATEMENT

ITUC-Asia Pacific Regional Conference on Asbestos

23-24 October 2026 | Jakarta, Indonesia

There is NO safe use of asbestos.

Indonesia urged to move ahead with transition out of asbestos to safer alternative materials as a matter of urgency

We, the affiliates of the ITUC–Asia Pacific, together with allied and partner organisations, victims of asbestos, and academics from 12 countries in the region, met on 23-24 October 2026 at the ITUC-Asia Pacific Regional Meeting on Asbestos in Jakarta, Indonesia.

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 and production to disposals and waste management.

The meeting noted:

- that more than 200,000 workers die from asbestos-related diseases every year;
- that the World Health Organization and the ILO clearly advise on the need for all countries to stop using all types of asbestos, including chrysotile, as the most effective means to reduce asbestos-related diseases;
- the economic and health impact assessments of countries banning asbestos (i.e., Cambodia and Laos) completed in the region in the last year, which provide evidence of the enormous benefits to workers' health, the environment, and the economy of countries banning asbestos and moving to safer alternatives;
- the momentum building across the Asia and the Pacific region on asbestos transition to safer materials including from the Philippines, Malaysia, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Fiji and here in Indonesia;
- that 75 countries and territories globally have already banned the import and use of all types of asbestos due to its toxicity, including in the Asia and the Pacific region, Australia, Brunei, Japan, New Zealand, Nauru, and South Korea;
- that 70 percent of all occupational linked cancers are due to asbestos exposure; and
- the Asian Development Bank's prohibition on all asbestos-containing materials from its investments from January 2026.

We are deeply concerned that over 80 percent of the current global consumption of 1.3 million tonnes of asbestos fibre is in Asia. We condemn the fact that over 200,000 workers around the world die each year due to occupational exposure to asbestos from diseases such as lung cancer, asbestosis, mesothelioma, and ovarian cancer, among others.

Millions of workers—most of them now in developing countries in the Asia and the Pacific region—continue to be exposed to asbestos, resulting in unnecessary deaths and serious ill-health, despite the availability of safer alternative products.

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

The meeting expressed strong solidarity with Indonesian campaign initiatives that led to the Supreme Court of Indonesia's decision to mandate health warning labelling on asbestos-containing materials.

The meeting called on the asbestos industry to immediately cease its tactics of intimidation and harassing legal action in their blatant attempts to delay asbestos bans and silence voices that warn workers and the public of the risk of exposure to this material.

It also called on countries in the region to cooperate on asbestos regulation and discourage companies that use asbestos from moving their operations across borders to avoid the impact of asbestos regulations on their operations.

Specific priority actions for ITUC, its affiliates and advocates, should include:

- Continuing the 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;
- Campaigning for improved diagnosis and just compensation and compensation systems for workers and other victims of asbestos-related diseases;
- Joining the campaign to demand the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank to prohibit asbestos-containing materials from all future investments;
- Supporting the campaign as requested, by ITUC-Asia Pacific, to seek Parties to the Rotterdam Convention to resolve long-running issues of recommended chemicals being blocked from listing to allow vital information on toxic substances from being shared;
- Condemning the asbestos industry's legal, intimidatory, and misinformation tactics in seeking to delay regulation in countries in Asia and the Pacific still using this deadly material;
- Continuing to raise public awareness of occupational health and safety issues as part of broader organising strategies;
- Seeking regional forums, such as, but not limited to, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) to take up the issue of asbestos transition and bans and management of remaining asbestos in the build environment to protect workers from asbestos-related diseases; and
- Centering the voice of asbestos victims in campaign activities and efforts to lobby for the transition to safer alternatives.

Specific priority actions for governments across Asia and the Pacific that are still using asbestos

We call on our governments to:

- Urgently follow the ADB and 75 countries and territories 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;
- Ratify the ILO Convention Nos. 162 and 155 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;
- Support reforms that end the corporate capture of the Rotterdam Convention and ensure listing of all recommended hazardous chemicals, including chrysotile;
- Ensure a Just Transition to asbestos-free alternatives, ensuring that workers' rights and livelihoods are protected throughout this transition; and
- Raise the issue in regional forums as a matter of urgency.

Recommendations to the ITUC-Asia Pacific Regional Council

The meeting recommends that ITUC-Asia Pacific:

- Continue the trade union-led regional asbestos action network, including through regional and sub-regional bodies such as the Pacific Islands Council of Trade Unions and the South Asian Regional Trade Union Council, for campaigning and sharing information to support the momentum built in the region in transitioning out of this toxic substance;
- Lead in seeking the ASEAN, SAARC, and PIF to take up the issue of eliminating asbestos-related diseases and transitioning out of asbestos to prevent the deaths of thousands of workers each year in this region, which consumes 80 percent of all asbestos still traded;
- Urge affiliates across Asia and the Pacific to advocate for asbestos bans to make the region asbestos free and demand just compensation and compensation systems for victims;
- Call on the asbestos industry to immediately cease its tactics of intimidation and harassing legal action in their blatant attempts to delay asbestos bans and silence voices that warn workers and the public of the risk of exposure to this material;
- Demand the IFC-WB group join the ADB, AIIB, and EBRD in prohibiting asbestos-containing materials from all future investments;
- Urge companies across the region still using asbestos or asbestos materials to transition to safer materials and stop putting their workers at risk.
- Call on Parties to the Rotterdam Convention to resolve long-running issues of recommended chemicals being blocked from listing to allow vital information on toxic substances from being shared.