

We have a Right to Know!
The Rotterdam Convention must be modernised to protect human health and the environment.

The Rotterdam Convention again remains paralysed by the tactics of Industry and a small group of countries, that block the listing of highly hazardous chemicals and pesticides, including chrysotile asbestos, that cause death and significant harm to human health and the environment.

The Rotterdam Convention is a critical tool for the safe and sound management of chemicals globally. Its Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure ensures that countries have a RIGHT TO KNOW what highly hazardous listed chemicals and pesticides are entering their country. This allows them to take appropriate regulatory action to restrict or prohibit entry to safeguard the health of their citizens and the environment.

Prior to COP11, which is meeting this week in Geneva, there were 5 chemicals which met all the criteria for listing, including the unanimous support of the Convention's Chemical Review Committee, that remain blocked for listing. This includes the highly hazardous chrysotile asbestos. Asbestos is one of the biggest killers of workers globally and is responsible for the deaths of more than 200,000 workers every year. In addition to chrysotile asbestos four pesticides remain blocked which cause significant harm to health of workers, particularly in developing countries. At this year's COP the list of blocked chemicals continues to grow with the addition of another hazardous pesticide. These tactics highlight the increasing threat the Convention faces and reinforce the need for reform.

A global coalition of more than **40 trade unions and civil society organisations** expressed their frustration and dismay that again the Parties have failed to list chrysotile asbestos and other hazardous chemicals. These blocking tactics threaten the viability of the Convention and make a mockery of its objective to warn countries of the most dangerous chemicals entering their country.

In an [open letter](#) they are now calling on all Parties to the Rotterdam Convention to support an [amendment to the Convention](#) which has been proposed by Australia, Switzerland and 12 other Parties¹, and which offers a new simple solution to improve the effectiveness of the Convention, whilst protecting the consensus principle at its core. It enables Parties who want to share information about hazardous chemicals to continue to do so. If approved, the amendment will introduce a new pathway for listing chemicals, when the CRC has recommended them for listing, but unanimous agreement to list them in Annex III cannot be reached by the COP.

Recently three UN experts – Marcos Orellana, Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights; David R. Boyd, Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment; and Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation – also issued a [statement](#) urging Parties to adopt the amendment proposal.

The proposal to amend the Convention will be considered later this week and we demand all Parties support the amendment.

Quotes attributable to:

“For too many years, a small number of States Parties have disregarded the recommendations of the Chemical Review Committee and blocked the listing of hazardous chemicals in Annex III. This has

¹ Australia, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Costa Rica, Georgia, Ghana, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, the Republic of Maldives, South Africa, Switzerland, Togo and the United Kingdom

weakened the ability of the Convention to fulfill its core purpose.” **Marcos Orellana, Special Rapporteur on toxics and human rights**

“A safe and healthy working environment has now been recognised internationally as a fundamental human right for workers. Workers in construction, agriculture and beyond must have the right to know if they are working with deadly substances like asbestos or dangerous pesticides. That right for workers would also protect consumers and communities. But without reform of the Rotterdam Convention, that information will remain hidden if just a handful of governments bend to the undemocratic, greed-driven lobbying of corporations who put profit before people and planet.” **Owen Tudor, Deputy General Secretary International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)**

“It is highly lamentable that the greed of some business interests is taking precedence over the right of governments to critical information and exercise the prior informed consent to protect its citizens and the community from harmful industrial chemicals. The proposed amendment to the Rotterdam Convention is intended to fulfil its envisioned mandate.” **Ambet Yuson, General Secretary, Building Workers International (BWI)**

“Countries have a right to know about the hazardous chemicals that are entering their country. The blocking tactics of Industry and a small number of countries, is endangering workers, in particular those from developing countries. If the Rotterdam Convention is going to meet its full potential it must be reformed. The lives of millions of workers are at stake.” **Liam O’Brien, Assistant Secretary, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)**

“A small group of countries should not be able to block the world's right to know about trade in highly toxic chemicals. More information about chemicals that pose serious threats to our health and healthy environments should be welcomed by all countries. IPEN supports workers' and all people's right to know about toxic threats to our health.” **Sara Brosche, International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN)**

“The continual blocking of lethal chemicals from Annex III by a small minority of Parties is seriously undermining the Convention’s function to share vital information and empower governments to take responsible action on trade and use of hazardous chemicals. The current paralysis impacts poorer countries the most.

PAN urges all Parties to support the proposed amendments and restore the proper functioning of a critical international treaty in order to better protect people and the environment from hazardous chemicals.” **Dr Sheila Willis, Pesticide Action Network UK**

“For 18 years hazardous chemicals recommended for listing onto the Convention by its own scientific committee have been blocked by a small number of Parties who have exploited and manipulated the consensus principle within the Convention for their own self-interest. The time to fix this is long overdue. We call on all Parties to support the amendment proposed at this COP11.” **Phillip Hazelton, Union Aid Abroad- APHEDA**

“The theme of this year’s Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conferences is “Accelerating Action”. But in gross contradiction to this some Parties continue to block the listing of highly hazardous substances in the Rotterdam Convention. If the other Parties truly wish to accelerate action, they must amend the Convention now to stop the blocking tactics orchestrated by the industry.” **Bernhard Herold, Solidar Suisse**

Attachments:

[Open letter to the Rotterdam Convention](#)

[UN experts urge Parties to the Rotterdam Convention to adopt amendment](#)

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