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Continuing asbestos use in Indonesia is a public health time bomb

Australia must play a role in ending the production and use of asbestos in Asia, where exposure kills and estimated 60,000 people every year.

There is still a huge amount of work to be done to ensure that Australian workplaces are safe from asbestos contamination, but the Morrison Government must also take immediate action to address this massive public health crisis in our region by:

- Ensure that no Australian or international development money is funding asbestos in Asia through the Asian Development Bank.
- Lead reform of the UN Rotterdam Convention that regulates trade in dangerous chemicals which is currently hijacked by the asbestos producer countries.
- Support and resources to assist in defeating the lies and misinformation of the asbestos industry lobby through a regional initiative.

Quotes attributable to Phillip Hazelton, Asia Campaign Coordinator for the Elimination of Asbestos Related Diseases at Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA:

“Asbestos is still being widely used in Asia and millions of people are being exposed to this deadly substance. There are an estimated 220,000 deaths every year from asbestos related diseases, 60,000 of those in Asia. The Asian death toll is expected to skyrocket in coming decades. The vast majority of sufferers do not know what is causing their cancer and in many places there is often no treatment or compensation,” he said.

“Australia understands the tragic legacy of asbestos all too well and we have a duty to show strong international leadership to end asbestos use. As an organisation of the Australian Union movement we’re proud of the legacy of the hard-fought battles to win an asbestos ban in Australia and just compensation for those with asbestos diseases.

“Indonesia is the second largest importer of raw asbestos in the world. Asbestos is used in construction, manufacturing and a range of products and processes.

“Doctors, Trade Unions, activists, people suffering with asbestos related diseases, workers and community members in Asia are working to end asbestos use. The asbestos lobby is using lies and misinformation on the ‘safe use’ of asbestos to keep their industry alive at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives.

“The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency in Australia does vital work in managing our remaining asbestos hazard and reducing exposures in Australia and we’re proud to work with them to help fulfil their goal of international leadership and cooperation on combatting the hazards of asbestos exposure and pushing for a global ban.

“While asbestos is being mined, traded and manufactured around the world we will continue to see it illegally imported into Australia. The only way to stop new asbestos coming into our workplaces and communities is a global ban.”

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O’Brien:

“Australia has a horrible history with asbestos, every year 5000 Australians die of asbestos related diseases.

“We are failing in our obligations to our region if we do not act to end the use of this incredibly deadly material.

“Every week asbestos containing materials are detected at our borders being imported to Australia from our region. Bringing about effective global bans not only protects workers in our regions but also Australian.

“We call on the Morrison Government to take action to protect the health of working people across Asia, including in Australia by taking immediate action at home and leading reform internationally.”

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