

FOURTH UNECE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION MEETING ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

GENEVA, 1-2 December 2009

Agenda item 8. Mining

Intervention by the Women in Europe for a Common Future¹

Canada just presented that mining should be sustainable and healthy, and the „products should contribute to a better life“. But Canada, among other countries like Russia and Kazakhstan still runs chrysotile asbestos mines. A substance Canada has long banned in its own country, but is still exporting it to India and other asbestos manufacturing countries. Prominent health experts from eight Canadian universities and leading health organisations, including the Canadian Cancer Society, are asking Health Minister Aglukkaq to deal with Canada's growing epidemic of asbestos-related disease and to end the use and mining of asbestos.

Despite that a tiny handful of countries are blocking the Rotterdam Convention, where chrysotile asbestos is recommended for listing under Annex III, this means that they block will of the overwhelming majority of the Parties. They are putting trade before human health. They say that “more studies need to be done”, trying to deny the reality that the

Convention's expert scientific body has completed the scientific process of the Convention and rendered its recommendation.

While we are here in Geneva, some of the 90,000 people that die each year from asbestos-related diseases due to occupational exposure will lose their lives. Some individuals will learn that they have mesothelioma, a rapidly progressing and incurable cancer, and will know that they will soon be among the 90,000 added every year to this rising toll. All deaths related to asbestos can be prevented. About 125 million people in the world are exposed to this health threat at the workplace. At what cost? In Europe alone, the 400,000 asbestos-related cancer deaths expected over the next few decades would result in at least US\$ 500 billion costs for insurance and compensation. The suffering of the victims of asbestos and their loved ones cannot be measured in monetary terms.

¹ The text is presented as received from the author.