

## IWMD Commemoration Events Asia-Pacific Region 2010

The International Workers Memorial Day was observed by several BWI affiliates in the Asia Pacific region. While the reports are still coming in, a few of the prominent activities organized in the region have been outlined below.

### INDIA

**Delhi:** In the Indian capital city of New Delhi, a joint hunger strike was organised by the BWI and IMF calling for a ban on Asbestos. Local affiliates of both the GUFs took part in the event. Speaking on the occasion, RC Khuntia, BWI World Board Member and Member of Parliament stressed that *“it’s certainly a long drawn battle and with a strong Asbestos industry lobby it is tough but together the trade union movement and the civil society could make a difference in making the masses aware of the ill-effects of Asbestos and move towards a gradual ban”*. Senior leaders from the national trade union centers – Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS); All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) addressed the workers. Later on, a joint BWI / IMF charter of demand was submitted at the Prime Minister’s Office by Sudershan Rao, Director, IMF South Asia and Anup Srivastava, Education Officer, South Asia. The highlights of the demands were:

- *The Ministry of Labour, Government of India should commission an independent study on Asbestos and its hazardous impact, especially on the workers.*
- *The Government should immediately impose ban on all Asbestos imports and related usage to make India Asbestos Free. Asbestos trade with countries such as Canada, who are not using Asbestos in their country and are dumping it in India, should be immediately stopped.*
- *The Indian Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Consumer Affairs and Ministry of Mines as well to initiate steps for immediate ban on use, manufacture and trade of all forms of asbestos (including Chrysotile or White Asbestos).*
- *ILO Conventions 162 on Asbestos; 167 on health and safety in construction and 155 on health and safety in general should be ratified by the Government of India.*
- *In 1995, Supreme Court of India had ordered that all industrial units where asbestos is used must maintain a health record of every worker up to a minimum period of 40 years. This should be strictly followed and asbestos related diseases health registry maintained for workers.*
- *Hold companies liable for exposing workers to such harm.*

**Chennai:** Commemorating the International Workers Memorial Day, the Tamil Nadu Unorganised Construction Workers Federation (TCWF) submitted a Charter of Demands to the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. M.K. Stalin and another Council of Minister in the Cabinet, Dr. K. Ponmudi regarding the need to curb on asbestos production & usage due to its lasting consequences. The delegation comprised Bro. Pon Kumar (President, TCWF), Bro. R. Karnan (General Secretary, TCWF) along with the BWI Projects Director (South Asia Region) – Dr. Rajeev Sharma and BWI Project South

India Coordinator – Gopal Reddy. A charter of demands was submitted and the highlights were:

- *The Ministry of Labour, Government of Tamil Nadu should commission an independent study on Asbestos and its hazardous impact, especially on the workers in Tamil Nadu state.*
- *Taking into account the hazardous effect of Asbestos usage, we urge the Government of Tamil Nadu to immediately impose ban on usage of Asbestos in all state government funded projects and then escalate the ban across all sectors state wide.*
- *In 1995, Supreme Court of India had ordered that all industrial units where asbestos is used must maintain a health record of every worker up to a minimum period of 40 years. This should be strictly followed and asbestos related diseases health registry maintained for workers in the state of Tamil Nadu.*
- *Hold companies liable for exposing workers to such harm.*

**Ahmedabad:** A program was organized by Bandhkam Majoor Sangathan, Ahmedabad on 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2010 to pay homage to all labourers who lost their lives in accidents at construction sites in Ahmedabad (Gujarat State). As per the information collected from Police Commissioner, Ahmedabad under the Right to Information Act (RTI) in the year 2009, 19 laborers and 3 children lost their lives at work sites while 8 labourers were seriously injured in 19 accidents in Ahmedabad.

On 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2010, several hundreds of BMS union members / workers gathered at a prominent State highway and formed a human chain. Public's attention was drawn by highlighting the names, age and reasons of death of the workers. Workers later on in the evening paid tribute by lighting candles. At the end of the program, a memorandum addressed to the Chief Minister was submitted. Following main demands were highlighted in the memorandum:

- *To provide safe and healthy working environment to every construction laborer at the working site and to provide safety equipment free of cost.*
- *To take strict action against people (builders, contractors, supervisors, etc.) irresponsible towards safety of laborers, by taking strict legal actions against them and sending them to jail.*
- *To give compensation of Rs.1 lakh to survivors of the laborer and also to pay Rs.1 lakh compensation for permanent disability (even if the laborer is not a beneficiary of board).*
- *To strictly follow The Building and Other Construction Workers' Act, 1996.*

**Nepal:** BWI Nepal Affiliates Committee along with IMF affiliates organized a workshop under the theme "**BAN ASBESTOS, IT KILLS!**" on the occasion of International Workers Memorial Day on 28 April 2010 at Lalitpur. The workshop, for the first time brought together trade unions (including national centres NTUC-I and GEFONT); National OSH Centre; Federation of Contractors Association of Nepal (FCAN). Constituent Assembly members Shanti Jirel and Yogilal Yadav addressed the workers and stressed on a complete ban on Asbestos in Nepal. Audio and print media covered the event.

**Philippines:** The National Union of Building and Construction Workers (NUBCW) together with other community groups in Subic, Philippines commemorated the International Workers' Memorial Day (IWMD) through highlighting the unsafe working conditions inside the Hanjin Shipbuilding facilities. This year's IWMD theme "*We Work To Live Not To Die*" summarized the more or less 600 accidents resulting in 62 deaths inside the said facility. According to the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE), there were only 19 deaths caused by accidents inside Hanjin but apparently according to some of the leaders, there are several unreported cases of accidents and deaths.

Aside from the unhealthy and unsafe working conditions, workers also suffered from maltreatment and abuses of both Koreans and Filipino Hanjin management team. They are hit by some of the Korean foremen. They make them stand under the sun for more than 2 hours and rotten meals served as "punishment" for forming trade union in Hanjin. The Hanjin management has appealed to revoke the Union's registration issued by the Bureau of Labour Relations of the Department of Labour and Employment.

In his speech, Alfie Alipio, one of the key leaders of the union in Hanjin, said that until now there is no justice for the victims. He stated that "when a worker in Hanjin reports to work, his one foot is already in the grave". We want to form a union but the management always find ways to terminate our leaders mentioned Alfie. We are also calling upon our local and national governments to make Hanjin pay for the series of accidents and deaths as well as maltreatment and abuses. "

The activity started at 6:30 in the evening with a mobilization around the community and a short programme. It ended up through candle lighting in the middle of the street. Around 200 workers from Hanjin Ship Building Facilities as well as from the community in Subic joined the celebration together with the delegates from the BWI regional office and NUBCW.

**Hong Kong:** After the Asian Asbestos Conference was held in Hong Kong last year, CSWGU and NGOs for labour (Association for the Rights of Industrial Accident Victims, Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs, Neighbourhood and Worker's Service Centre) formed the "**Ban Asbestos Alliance**" focusing on asbestos issues.

Residents of Ma Shi Po village contacted CSWGU last month regarding developers ignoring safety standards to demolishing houses with asbestos. Ban Asbestos Alliance held a press conference at Ma Shi Po village on 16<sup>th</sup> April to show smashed asbestos to reporters. It was pointed out that the workers demolishing the village houses were without any protection and asbestos sheets were dumped everywhere in village is harmful for the villagers. The press conference at Ma Shi Po village was a prelude action to 1<sup>st</sup> May and IWMD in Hong Kong.

**Korea:** For this year's International Workers Memorial Day activities, the KFCITU participated in the "Campaign to Address Accidents and Deaths at the Work Place." The campaign was coordinated by the two national centres---the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and the Federation of Korean Trade Unions along with the Korean Democratic Labour Party, New Jinbo Party, the Maeil Labour News and the Solidarity for Workers Health.

Campaign activities included commemorations for workers who had died as a result of work-related accidents. In addition, in an effort to push companies to be held more accountable for work-related accidents as well as to ensure better safety, the KFCITU highlighted the most “deadliest” construction companies.

GS Construction came in first with a total of 14 workers who died due to work-related accidents. This was followed by Daelim Construction with nine deaths and tying third were Kyungnam Construction, Suhhee Construction, and Hyundai Construction. It should be noted that in 2009, 606 construction workers were killed as a result of accidents at the work site.

**Malaysia:** In Malaysia, the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) and the BWI jointly organised a workshop under the theme "*Unions Make Works Safer*" as a part of the ongoing BWI Global Campaign on "BAN ASBESTOS." Over 60 participants from different MTUC affiliated unions; Employer's organisation representing Asbestos factories; Academicians, representative from health ministry, Department of Occupational Safety and Health and representative of Asian Ban Asbestos Network (A-BAN) took part in the programme.

Speaking on the occasion MTUC President - Syed Shahir bin Syed Mohamud mentioned that the "MTUC is pushing through to make workplace free from all types of hazardous chemical including Asbestos which directly affect the life of workers severely". Briefing the BWI intervention on Ban Asbestos Campaign, BWI Asia Pacific Regional Committee Member, Mohd Khalid Atan stated "The BWI has been assisting its affiliates to launch awareness campaigns and engaging the government and other stakeholders for pushing towards a ban on Asbestos, which is responsible for nearly 100,000 deaths every year".

The first working session scheduled for panel discussion on "Hazards of Asbestos" was chaired by Dr. Krishna Gopal Rampal, Professor of Occupational Health Medical Faculty where Dr. Riadz, Ministry of Health; Bro. Encik Fadzil Bin Osman from NIOSH, Apolinar Tolentino, Officer in Charge, BWI-A/P, Mohd Khalid Atan from MTUC and Sanjiv Pandita from A-BAN were the panelists.

Presentations focused on Asbestos - its production and consumption, diseases, medical interpretation on the affects of Asbestos exposure. Asbestos consumption in Malaysia is declining but still many old Malaysian factories were using asbestos roofing. Sanjiv Pandita from A-BAN shared the grass root experience from different countries on victims and social cost. Apolinar Tolentino alerted that Asbestos production network is aggressively campaigning to promote the safe use of Asbestos. He emphasized that any form of asbestos is harmful and there is no way it could be safely used. The employer's representative from Asbestos use factory argued that until and unless there is clear evidence of death and victims, it's not wise to ban Asbestos. If we all go for ban then there should be some other alternative which can replace the asbestos. Panelists counter argued that lack of medical expertise and concrete process of examination it's difficult to show the victims as the affect appears after long period.

The second session panel discussion on "Action to Achieve Total Ban on the Usage of Asbestos" was chaired by Bro. Rajasekaran, MTUC General Secretary. Tn. Hj. Anuar

bin Mokhtar, the representative from Department of Occupational Safety and Health said that the Malaysian government is very supportive to Ban the use of Asbestos in Malaysia but it needs extensive research and study with viable recommendation so that all stake holders could work together for total ban. Apolinar Tolentino presented the BWI strategy and action plan on global ban of Asbestos. At the end of the session the following points were highlighted:

- a. Malaysian companies are using Asbestos materials under the regulation of Malaysian building provisions. However, deep and detail study to be carried out to find the different form of use of Asbestos, to make a strategic plan and to evaluate the social consequences on total Ban of Asbestos.
  - b. Malaysian companies are under self regulation on OSH issues. Still lack of clear direction regarding ban asbestos, Malaysian Government needs to play pro-active role to meet the declared deadline of 2015.
  - c. Phase wise action to be formulated urgently to achieve the goal of total banning asbestos by 2015.
  - d. BWI and MTUC will work hand-in-hand to ban asbestos in Malaysia along with other stake holders and networks.
  - e. ILO and WHO will be invited to highlight The National Programme for the Elimination of Asbestos.
  - f. All agencies, stake holders should work in coordinative way for total ban of Asbestos.
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