



INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION

No Lasting Peace without Social Justice...

No Social Justice without Social Security

Declaration on Asbestos, Beijing 2004

The *Special Commission on Prevention* of the International Social Security Association (ISSA), assembled in Beijing on 16 September on the occasion of the 28th General Assembly of the Association, issues the following appeal to governments in asbestos-producing countries:

- Asbestos is a natural mineral. Epidemiological findings show that all forms of asbestos fibre dust formed during extraction, transformation and utilization of all forms of asbestos, including chrysotil, are carcinogenic to humans. According to extrapolations of statistics on asbestos-related illnesses (asbestosis, lung and larynx cancer, mesothelioma), it is estimated that hundreds of thousands people around the world fall ill each year as a result of asbestos exposure in the workplace. To date, thousands of people die as a result of these diseases.
- Throughout the 20th century, asbestos has been used for the manufacturing of the most diverse products. Whatever the different transformation this material has gone through, its dangerous characteristics still remain latent.
- Several hundred million US dollars have already been spent for compensation payments. A number of companies have filed for bankruptcy after being faced with overwhelming compensation claims.
- Despite the devastating effect it has on the lives and health of people and the looming economic threat it poses, approximately 2.5 million tonnes of asbestos are still manufactured each year.
- It took three decades of protracted efforts and the emergence of suitable alternatives for a comprehensive ban on the manufacture and use of asbestos and asbestos-containing products to be adopted in a number of industrialised countries. These countries now permit the handling of asbestos only during demolition, renovation and maintenance work.
- Decades may pass between initial exposure to asbestos and the appearance of related disease symptoms, triggering a public health time bomb in all countries where asbestos has not been banned.

The ISSA *Special Commission on Prevention* urges all countries to ban the manufacture, trade and use of all types of asbestos and asbestos-containing products as soon as possible.