

Press Release ROCA (Rotterdam Convention Alliance), distributed by its partner WECF: asbestos, health, environment, India



India isolated in Rome for playing into industry hands

1st November 2008, Rome - India faced isolation of an unprecedented nature in the last day of the Fourth Conference of Parties (COP4) of the just concluded Rotterdam Convention in Rome. The Indian delegation led by Mr R H Khwaja and Mr M K Pandey of the MoEF were put in a spot when country after country, especially under-developed countries from Africa and Asia, such as Belize, Sudan, Oman and many others joined in accusing India for its entrenched position of not allowing the listing of Endosulfan, a highly toxic pesticide, into the list of hazardous substances that needed Prior-informed consent from the receiving country in global trade. India is the only country blocking the listing of endosulphan and countries wanted that the COP 4 text takes note of the fact that "a country" had opposed the listing.

Earlier in the day, another industrial chemical Chrysotile Asbestos also faced the same fate of non inclusion due to opposition from India, Kyrgyz Republic, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Russia, a non party, and a few others which are producers and exporters of this chemical. Chrysotile had come up for listing in COP3 in Geneva in 2006 and had been twice recommended for listing by the Chemical Review Committee of the Convention.

Due to opposition from a handful of countries, now both these substances have been deferred for decision to 2011 in the next COP of the Convention. "Thanks to a few countries which undermined and disrespected the consensus of poorer nations, we have ensured that countries exporting these poisons do not inform the importing countries of their dangers" said Madhumita Dutta of the Corporate Accountability Desk who is attending this conference as observer in the delegation of the Rotterdam Convention Alliance.

The Prior-Informed Consent (PIC) list is basically a list of hazardous substances that are subject to a regulation of mandatory information exchange among the signatory countries. This information exchange basically has two parts – one is for a country which has banned or severely restricted a chemical to inform other parties about the domestic regulations, and the other is for exporting countries to inform the other countries of its export through an export notification. While on the onset these are fundamental rights that need to be provided by any sovereign state, this Convention establishes a simple mechanism of doing this. The Convention was adopted in 1998, and since then there has been 4 COPs including the one this year.

"Its a shame that the 10th anniversary of this Convention, which should have seen adoption of these hazardous chemicals in the common larger good of public health, right to information and environmental protection, it has been simply murdered and that too by a handful of countries primarily led by India" said Sridhar Radhakrishnan of Thanal who also attended the conference as observer, "Endosulfan is a killer chemical and we in Kerala know it best. The tragedy caused by this chemical in the cashew plantations and the economic and toxic burden it has caused is still alive in our minds" he added. Kerala had banned Endosulfan since 2003. The Indian Industry led by Mr Ganeshan of the Indian Chemical Industry and Mr A K Sethi of the Asbestos Information Centre were present through out the Conference helping India manufacture this dissent. "While the Indian industry succeeded in getting the decisions deferred by at least three years, India was clearly isolated for playing political game for commercial interest and shamed by a global community. Which is a matter of great humiliation for all Indians" said Dutta.

"The blame cannot be on the Indian delegation" said one of the country delegation heads, "it's the political masters in New Delhi, who are the ones who brought this shame on the country"

The COP4 which started on the 26th of October in Rome ended on the 31st.

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