

EXTRACT OF THE FINAL REPORT OF THE COP-9 OF THE ROTTERDAM CONVENTION (GENEVA, MAY 2019)

Chrysotile asbestos

54. The representative of the Secretariat outlined the information in document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.9/10, containing a draft decision, including draft text of an amendment to list chrysotile asbestos, and document UNEP/FAO/RC/COP.9/10/Add.1, which contained the draft decision guidance document on that chemical. She recalled that the Conference of the Parties had deliberated on the listing of chrysotile asbestos in Annex III to the Convention at its third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth meetings, and had not been able to reach consensus on its listing. In its decision RC-3/3, the Conference of the Parties had decided that all the requirements set out in Articles 5 and 7 for listing in Annex III had been met for chrysotile asbestos. At its eighth meeting, given that no consensus had been reached on the issue of listing, the Conference of the Parties had decided to defer further consideration of the issue to the current meeting.

55. In the ensuing discussion, many representatives, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, voiced strong support for listing chrysotile asbestos in Annex III to the Convention, underscoring that the Conference of the Parties had already agreed that all the criteria for listing had been met and that the listing was long overdue and would enable the Parties to make informed decisions on the chemical.

56. Many other representatives opposed the listing, emphasizing that chrysotile asbestos was different to other forms of asbestos and could be safely used under controlled circumstances and that scientific data confirming that it posed an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment was lacking. A number of representatives said that the issue of listing chrysotile asbestos in Annex III should not be considered further by the Conference of the Parties unless and until new scientific data to justify the listing was submitted for its consideration.

57. A number of representatives suggested that in-depth scientific research should be conducted within the framework of the Rotterdam Convention to substantiate the health and environmental effects of chrysotile asbestos both in occupational and non-occupational settings.

58. One representative, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, emphasized that the purpose of the Rotterdam Convention was not to carry out risk assessments or comprehensive assessments of specific chemicals or their alternatives, but to analyse the notifications of final regulatory action taken by Parties on specific chemicals against the criteria set out in the Convention. Another representative, noting that the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization (WHO) had classified all forms of asbestos as carcinogenic, said that there were multiple sources of scientific information substantiating the negative human health effects of all forms of asbestos, including chrysotile.

59. The representative of WHO said that, as previously indicated by WHO, there was conclusive and overwhelming scientific evidence that chrysotile asbestos caused cancer in humans, specifically mesothelioma and cancer of the lung, larynx and ovary, and that no threshold for adverse effects had been identified and therefore no safe levels of exposure to the chemical could be established. She further stressed that chrysotile asbestos was widely used in building materials and in vehicle parts, where the exposure of workers and the general public could not be avoided,

that chrysotile-containing products degraded in situ and presented waste management challenges, particularly following natural and other disasters, and that cases of mesothelioma did occur in countries producing and using chrysotile but may be underreported due to inadequate cancer detection systems. Safer alternatives to chrysotile had been deployed in many countries, and WHO would continue to offer its support to countries to address the problem of chrysotile asbestos and the serious threats it posed to public health.

60. The representative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) said that the ILO Asbestos Convention, 1986 (No. 162), which covered all forms of asbestos, including chrysotile, outlined measures to be taken for the prevention of health hazards due to occupational exposure to asbestos, which were classified as carcinogens by the International Agency for Research on Cancer of WHO. She called for the elimination of all future uses of asbestos and the identification and proper management of asbestos currently in place. She stressed that the ILO Asbestos Convention should not be used to justify or endorse the continued use of asbestos and that ILO supported measures that provided for the protection of workers from all forms of asbestos.

61. Given the lack of consensus, the Conference of the Parties agreed to defer further consideration of chrysotile asbestos to its tenth meeting.