

## Brazil's Position on Chrysotile – No Position!

by Engineer Fernanda Giannasi

Coordinator of Latin American Virtual Ban Asbestos Network,

Founding Member of Brazilian Association of Asbestos-Exposed Victims (ABREA)

At the COP1 discussions (2004) on the inclusion of chrysotile on the PIC list, there was a deafening silence from the Brazilian delegation, despite a public commitment given by the (Brazilian) Environment Minister (1999, 2001)<sup>1,2</sup>, the Health Minister (1999)<sup>3</sup> and Labour Ministry representatives (2004)<sup>4</sup> to ban asbestos. Brazil was silent in 2004 and looks likely to stay silent when the subject is discussed at the COP3 (October 2006). From the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest asbestos producer and a major exporter, this silence is, at the very least, suspicious!

When Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva became President (2002), the first trade unionist to hold this post, the ban asbestos commitment of his political party (the Workers' Party) and trade union wavered, no doubt under intense pressure from the powerful asbestos industry lobby. Instead of a ban, Lula established an Interministerial Commission on Asbestos. Delegates from 7 Ministries took evidence and deliberated; then they deliberated some more. After producing a 1,000 page document, the major decision taken was... **not to take a decision**<sup>5</sup>.

This policy to actively do nothing is still the official line as reported by people who attended a meeting in Brasilia on September 9, 2006 to discuss our position on chrysotile at the upcoming meeting in Geneva. Better to let countries, like Canada, India and Kazakhstan shout out their objections and for Brazil to remain apparently neutral. This appearance of impartiality would placate the industry even if it antagonized the asbestos victims, many of whom will be too ill to vote in the coming elections in October 2006. While many ABREA members have deserted the Workers' Party in sheer disgust at its impotence over asbestos, industry lobbyists remain supportive, both politically and financially. It is public knowledge that selected federal politicians have received donations from asbestos stakeholders; in return, they defend Brazilian chrysotile from adverse publicity and **acting against** moves to regulate or ban its use. The purchase of these political allies has attracted **some** coverage from the national and international mass media and **hard** criticism from the public.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

Excluído: little

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According to ABREA's President, Eliezer João de Souza:

“Since the formation of ABREA we have worked closely with scientists and doctors to produce statistics on the numbers of people who have contracted asbestos-related disease from exposure to Brazilian chrysotile; in the absence of any official Brazilian register of asbestos disease, ABREA's data documents the devastating impact asbestos has had in the country. Despite the Government's uncertainties and the industry's propaganda, Brazilian chrysotile is not safe!

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<sup>1</sup> In “Ministro decide proibir uso de amianto no País”, Jornal “O Estado de São Paulo”, 29/7/1999.

<sup>2</sup> In “Amianto deve ser banido do País até 2003, Jornal “O Estado de São Paulo”, 11/3/2001.

<sup>3</sup> In “Pesquisa inédita vai mostrar se amianto tem impacto na saúde”, Jornal “O Globo”, 24/1/1999.

<sup>4</sup> In Jornal “Governo vai banir uso do amianto no país”. Jornal “Folha de São Paulo”, Caderno Dinheiro, 28/3/2004.

<sup>5</sup> In “O governo vacila, a sociedade avança”. Revista Época. 363:50, 02/05/05. <http://revistaepoca.globo.com/Epoca/0,6993,EPT954475-1659,00.html>

<sup>6</sup> In “Um Mundo de Coincidências: As relações entre congressistas e financiadores de campanhas eleitorais”. Revista Carta Capital, 348(XI), 29/6/2005.

<sup>7</sup> In “Lobby Mortal: Vida e Morte pelo Amianto”. Revista Época, Caderno Negócios, 360:10-13, 11/4/2005, [http://www.abrea.org.br/epoca\\_lobby\\_amianto.pdf](http://www.abrea.org.br/epoca_lobby_amianto.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> In “Asbestos: Slow Death”. French-Canadian video documentary by Sylvie Deleule, featured at TVs Arte (in France) and Radio Canada in Nov./Dec., 2004.

It is a sad fact, but true nonetheless, that there are thousands of Brazilians whose health has been ruined by exposure to asbestos at work, at home and in the environment. There is no “controlled use” of asbestos in Brazil; Brazilian chrysotile is neither “pure” nor “harmless.” Asbestos is a public health problem on a colossal scale in our country. Globally it is considered the biggest sanitary catastrophe of the XX<sup>th</sup> Century!

The Rotterdam Convention is therefore a much-needed multilateral environmental agreement under which countries would be provided with documentation explaining the hazards posed by the use of toxic chemicals such as chrysotile asbestos. As asbestos victims ourselves, we feel that full prior disclosure of all the risks is a moral imperative. ABREA and the global asbestos victims’ movement believe that the PIC listing of chrysotile should be approved as a matter of urgency at COP3!”