8 February 2019

Ms. Julia Collins

Independent Review of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency

Department of Jobs and Small Business

Canberra

whspolicy@jobs.gov.au

Dear Ms. Collins,

Re: Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA Submission to the Review into ASEA

Please find attached a submission to this review by Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA. Our submission deals with terms of reference two and three in particular.

For further information, please contact [redacted]

Yours sincerely



Kate Lee

Executive Officer

**Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA Submission to the Review into the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA)**

**Introduction to Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA**

Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA is the global justice organisation of the Australian trade union movement. Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA is fully accredited with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and is a Registered Charity with the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission. Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA is also a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct.

Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA began in 1984 and currently works with partners in 13 countries and regions globally with 44 partner organisations and 32 projects. The organisation has country offices in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Timor Leste and Myanmar with a head office in Sydney. In 2010 the organisation began promoting asbestos hazard awareness in Asia and since 2017 the agencies flagship campaign has been **Asbestos. Not here. Not anywhere** with a focus on SE Asia and Vietnam, Indonesia Laos and Cambodia in particular. In this campaign we coordinate closely with concerned national governments, trade unions, NGO’s, UN agencies, scientists, researchers and enterprises. Support for this campaign comes from trade unions in Australia, individual donations, DFAT, ASEA and international partners.

In 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA was funded by ASEA to support outcomes and deliverables related to the strategy six ‘International Leadership’, of the 2013-18 National Strategic Plan (NSP). In addition to funding, the collaboration has led to technical collaborations between the Australian government and that of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam Governments. In 2019, this support from ASEA has directly contributed to Australia now being seen as an important voice in the global campaign against asbestos hazards. Ban networks have been expanded and strengthened across South East Asia and significant progress towards banning asbestos has been achieved in target countries.

Our comments below relate to terms of reference 2 and 3 in particular.

**Summary**

The contribution ASEA has made to international awareness, management and a global ban on asbestos mining and manufacture in our view has been very significant. ASEA’s work towards the International Leadership strategy is a strong positive influence on the efforts towards achieving asbestos bans in Asia. The role played in regard to promoting evidence based and best practice approaches in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in particular has been an important contributor to the progress towards asbestos bans in these countries in the last two years.

As long as asbestos products continue to be produced and consumed around the world there will be a danger of asbestos products coming into Australia. Australia is in a unique position to play a leading role because of our country’s legacy and knowledge of asbestos safety and eradication. All state and Federal governments have supported the inclusion of strategy six of the NSP as an important contributor to that effort, as well as to help prevent future asbestos related cancer epidemics in our near neighbours and region.

**Recommendation**

We believe that international leadership has been proven to be an important aspect of the work of ASEA to date and that this needs to be directly reflected in the Act as part of ASEA’s guiding principles. Including international activities in the Act would clarify the COAG support for that work, help meet future challenges in the protection of Australians from exposure to asbestos and significantly assist governments in the region to establish best practice responses to banning chrysotile asbestos, managing remaining asbestos, safe removal and disposal of waste asbestos materials. It will also mean that ASEA can continue to provide an important counter to the misinformation and lies of the asbestos lobby seeking to confuse governments in the region and indefinitely delay ban decisions.

Strategy Six

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| **Goal**: Australia continues to play a leadership role in a global campaign for a worldwide ban on asbestos mining and manufacturing. |
| **Deliverables** | **Outcomes**  |
| * Pursue opportunities for improvements in international arrangements for asbestos awareness, management, and a global ban on asbestos mining and manufacturing.
* Proactively share knowledge, tools and information on best practice with other countries and relevant international organisations.
 | 1. International issues relating to asbestos and asbestos-related diseases are effectively coordinated.
2. Australia is recognised as an international voice in the global campaign against asbestos hazards.
3. Best practice for awareness, management and eradication is shared internationally.
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**Supporting evidence for the summary and recommendation**

 In 2017-18 the following activities that support the NSP were funded by ASEA:

Activity 1 – Support sharing of Australian technical expertise and best practice in awareness raising on asbestos hazards and elimination of Asbestos Related Diseases (ARD) including promoting asbestos bans in selected countries

Activity 2: Support to coordination among ban networks and governments in the region

Activity 3: Research – Engaging with Governments and Civil Society in Asia to promote the restriction of asbestos use

Practical outputs from this collaboration included:

* Improved knowledge and awareness on exposure risks of chrysotile asbestos. This has directly contributed to the Prime Minister of Vietnam’s announcement in 2018 that Vietnam must stop manufacturing asbestos roof sheeting by 2023 at the latest.
* Support for the development of the first National Action Plan to Eliminate ARD in Laos including technical inputs into multi Ministry workshops. This plan has now been fully developed and approved by the Minister of Health and includes a proposed ban date for asbestos of 2020.
* Support to development of the first National Asbestos Profile (CNAP) in Cambodia including support for a five day training course in Cambodia for thirteen Ministries, trade unions and employers that are members of the National Working Group to develop the profile. Technical inputs were able to be shared on key aspects of asbestos including history of asbestos use, myths of safe use, and legal pathways to banning from Australian experience, health impacts of exposure and best practice removal and disposal. Significantly, the interaction and government to government linkage was an important element for Cambodian participants, who are also targeted with misinformation by the asbestos lobby. The CNAP has now been finalized and will be launched in early 2019.
* The decision by Bandung City Assembly, West Java, Indonesia in December 2018 to stop the use of asbestos in all future public buildings in the city. This is the first such decision by a regional government in Indonesia.
* International evidence on the harmful effects of exposure to chrysotile asbestos brought to the region particularly from Australia and Canada
* Strengthened ban asbestos networks and coordination in the region, including new ban networks in Laos and Cambodia.
* Strengthened links and technical exchanges between governments of Cambodia, Lao, Vietnam and Australia on asbestos ban and management issues
* Support learning and capacity building between national ban networks in the four countries and with broader networks regionally within the Asian Ban Network.

**Research**

With ASEA’s financial support, Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA produced a research report entitled ‘Engaging Governments and Civil Society in Asia to promote a ban on Asbestos’. Seventeen interviews were conducted across Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia and Laos with people involved in the campaign to ban asbestos. The research has been presented at the 5th International Conferences on Occupational and Environmental Health, Hanoi, Vietnam in September 2018 and at other workshops in Asia.

Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA has been engaged by ASEA in 2018-19 for the following activities:

Activity 1 Delivery of a workshop 'Asbestos Awareness and Pathways to Banning' with the National Assembly of Lao PDR in October/November 2018

* Providing knowledge and awareness of the exposure risks of chrysotile asbestos among National Parliament members, their advisers and key Ministry staff in Lao PDR
* Focusing on promoting the National Action Plan to Eliminate ARD in Lao PDR
* Providing updated evidence to the Assembly on chrysotile asbestos exposure risks and explore pathways to banning asbestos in Lao PDR.
* The workshop is expected to engage 50 participants
* ASEA will be invited to participate in this workshop.

Activity 2 Updating of the National Asbestos Profile for the Vietnamese Government:

* Supporting the Vietnamese Government in updating data on asbestos use to support the roadmap to ban asbestos roof sheet by 2023
* Supporting the Vietnamese Ministry of Health Agencies and OSH Institute to update key health and industry data in the Profile, including a survey of current roof sheet manufacturers.

Activity 3 Perform research, cooperation and awareness raising activities:

* Performing research and provide information on the policies of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AI IB) in regards to the procurement of asbestos products and support for the asbestos industry across the region
* Investigating and mapping the influence of Australian firms overseas in providing finance or financial products for projects that use asbestos containing products in the four target countries

**Sharing resources across Asia**

In Cambodia, the lack of information on the spread of asbestos materials has been a barrier to getting recognition of the scale of the problem. Testing at an Australian lab has led to a breakthrough with the campaign as government representatives have become aware of the scale of the problem for the first time. With the support of ASEA, Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA is working with local partners to supply microscopes, testing equipment and training in Cambodia so that materials can be tested in country instead of having to send them to Australia.

**Ban Asbestos Network Training**

Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA with support from ASEA has developed tools to assist Ban Asbestos Networks in Asia to strengthen their campaigns. With the support of ASEA and in cooperation with international organisations, Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA has produced seven training modules and a Chrysotile Asbestos Information Booklet. The information booklet is intended to counteract the misinformation from the asbestos industry and asbestos producing countries on the ‘safe use’ of asbestos. The training modules have already been presented at a meeting of Ban Networks in Sri Lanka in July 2018, in Hanoi in September 2018 and training sessions will take place across the region in 2018/19.

**Government to Government Asbestos Eradication Activities**

ASEA has been a vital partner in government to government activities across the region. Union Aid Abroad and ASEA’s regional leadership in coordination with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other bodies has facilitated the sharing of knowledge and experience as well as enabling a direct link to government representatives. This connection is vital to supporting a global campaign and adding legitimacy to arguments against the asbestos industry.

ASEA representatives have visited Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and Laos. In November 2018 ASEA CEO Justine Ross visited Laos for an international partner’s strategy meeting and technical workshop with Ministry of Health and related Ministries, Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA, WHO, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Korean OHS Association and ABAN.

Communication and cooperation from the Australian Government is an influential element in the campaign to ban asbestos in Asia. Governments of asbestos producing countries actively attempt to influence countries that are moving towards a ban to delay or reverse any ban decision. Misinformation on asbestos and related dangers is a key tactic of asbestos producing countries and the asbestos industry. When information from scientists is supported by Government it can have a stronger impact on political audiences in the region. All three governments (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) have requested ongoing technical support from ASEA in helping learn lessons and clarify evidence as they debate their own moves to ban asbestos.

When Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA developed an information booklet on Chrysotile Asbestos in 2018 we sought support from international networks and NGOs, but also sought endorsement from ASEA to lend governmental authority to the document as the audience for the document included government partners. Peter Tighe, at that time CEO of ASEA, provided the forward to the document that has since been distributed internationally and translated to four other languages and included the following:

“We are aware of attempts by some in the asbestos industry to misinform governments and policy makers in Asia and elsewhere about the toxic nature of chrysotile asbestos and attempting to place disease blame on other types of asbestos. This is completely untrue and should not be allowed to delay important action on stopping the use of chrysotile asbestos by any country.

“Australia will continue to be an international voice in the global campaign against asbestos hazards and against the continuing use of all types of asbestos – something this factual resource on chrysotile asbestos adds to significantly.”

**Future challenges**

Efforts to achieve a global ban or regulation of trade of asbestos have been blocked for many years by remaining producer countries, particularly in regard the Rotterdam Convention established in 2004 to provide prior informed consent to importing countries of hazardous chemicals. Chrysotile has been recommended for listing on this convention since 2006 by the UN’s independent scientific panel. It is continually blocked by a small number of countries led by current producers and exporters of chrysotile asbestos. Despite overwhelming evidence as to its toxic nature, there is no current global restriction on its trade.

Over 75% of current global asbestos consumption is in the Asia region. Only three of the 66 countries that have fully banned asbestos are in Asia (not including Middle East countries).

More and more Asian governments are considering banning chrysotile asbestos and struggling to manage asbestos in-situ. However even with alternative products being available globally for all previous asbestos containing materials, they are not always available locally and at comparable prices to ACM. Also asbestos disease long lead time and difficulty in diagnosis means local evidence of harm for new user countries and even some older user countries is not available.

The asbestos lobby and remaining producer countries (only 3 currently) are stepping up efforts to secure their deadly trade until their own stocks run out and are directly contradicting independent evidence, spreading misinformation, employing spies to try to weaken ban networks among other disingenuous dirty tactics.

**International Leadership**

The UN agencies WHO and ILO have developed clear recommendations and pathways for countries to stop using asbestos and managing remaining asbestos.

As we understand, ASEA remains the only stand-alone national level government asbestos eradication agency globally.

The work of Union Aid Abroad APHEDA and ASEA in collaboration as described above, has seen Australia recognised even by the International Chrysotile Alliance as now ‘leading the world …. with anti-asbestos activities’ (Dec 6 2018 letter to WHO).

In the past the asbestos industry has been able to influence governments across Asia with misinformation and lies to maintain its deadly trade. Now Australia is taking a leadership position to support UN recommendations, an evidenced based approach and direct advice to governments in the region to learn from Australia’s deadly legacy of heavy use of asbestos and asbestos products in the past. This is important work both to protect Australia from future exposures and to assist governments in the region to transition to safer alternatives to protect their population’s health and without impacting on their economies.