

Welcome Session

Moderator: Omana George

During this session, representatives of bodies central to the organization of the conference welcomed delegates and signposted key focal points for coming sessions.

Lee Cheuk-yan from the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions emphasized the need for local groups to continue pressure on Hong Kong authorities to prohibit the use of chrysotile asbestos, crocidolite and amosite asbestos having already been banned. Such a ban could prevent Hong Kong from becoming a dumping ground for asbestos unwanted in countries where bans had been enacted. The adoption of a comprehensive asbestos ban in Hong Kong would undoubtedly, he believed, have an impact on Chinese asbestos regulations.



Opening speaker Lee Cheuk-yan

The mobilization of the grass-roots ban asbestos movement in Asia was a prerequisite for progressing the regional campaign according to Sanjiv Pandita from the AMRC. To effectively combat industry propaganda, a partnership with other stakeholders, including asbestos victims groups, trade unions, NGOs and international agencies, and a coordinated strategic approach were needed, Mr. Pandita said.

Chan Kam-hong from the Association for the Rights of Industrial Accident Victims (ARIAV) paid tribute to the commitment and effectiveness of campaigning done in Hong Kong by pneumoconiosis and asbestos victims; pressure from victims had brought about improvements in compensation, medical treatment and rehabilitation services. The



Mrs. Sito (center) with Chan Kam-hong and Elsie Fung of ARIAV

voice of the victims remained an essential component for any campaign to ban asbestos; their views were expressed by Mrs. Sito, the wife of a Hong Kong mechanic and ship-builder who had been incapacitated by his asbestos-related illness. Mrs. Sito called for a total asbestos ban in Hong Kong. A minute of silence was observed to pay tribute to the victims.

Key points raised by speakers from international bodies included the:

- information vacuum in Asian countries about the asbestos hazard and the incidence of asbestos-related diseases;
- need for a proactive approach to Asia's increasing use of asbestos;
- elevated incidence of asbestos-related disease amongst construction workers;
- potential for future collaboration between grass-roots groups and other organizations;
- importance of networking among institutional bodies from different domains;
- need to work together on the development and dissemination of toolkits needed for the implementation of national asbestos action programs;
- need for a regional framework for occupational health and safety which would include work on the Asian asbestos initiative.