

# Reports

## 16.1 PERSONAL CONGRESS REPORT

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### Introduction

The Global Asbestos Congress took place in Osasco, São Paulo, Brazil from September 17-20, 2000. Amidst fireworks, Latin American music and the most amazing hospitality from Brazilian colleagues, nearly one hundred international guests and more than three hundred Brazilian delegates attended plenary sessions, workshops and round-table discussions supplemented by poster presentations, video screenings and a photographic exhibition. The international significance of this event was reinforced by the participation of the International Labour Organisation and other international and national trade unions, victim support groups and occupational and environmental health associations. Negritude Jr., one of Brazil's most popular singers, broadcast loud and clear the ban asbestos message at a musical "Tribute to the Asbestos Victims" on the Sunday before the Congress. The objective of this free concert was to bring the ban asbestos message to people who would not normally attend a formal conference. From the stage, they were invited to share the Congress experience by visiting the free photographic and poster exhibitions, Congress booths and stands at the Municipal Theatre.

Osasco was chosen as the venue for this international conference as it had been for decades the centre of Brazil's asbestos-cement industry. Now, it is unfortunately the home to many asbestos victims. ABREA, the Association of Brazilians Exposed to Asbestos, based in Osasco, worked closely with the Ban Asbestos Network and IBAS (International Ban Asbestos Secretariat) on all aspects of the Congress. These three groups were determined that this Congress would be an inclusive event bringing together victims and scientists, the community and the academic world, young and old. A competition for local schoolchildren stimulated interest and produced amazing posters; the winners of first and second prize were awarded a bicycle and VCR respectively. The Projeto Social Família Negritude and the FITO-Fundação Instituto Tecnológico de Osasco (the schools which the winning children came from) each received a computer. The children's highly imaginative and educational contributions were displayed in the hall side-by-side with academic posters.

Information-gathering at the formal sessions was just one part of the programme. The forging of personal contacts tend to be the most beneficial results of such an event. Discussions amongst the asbestos victims, the relatives of asbestos victims, asbestos victims' support representatives, doctors, medical specialists, nursing personnel, lawyers, sociologists, engineers, politicians, students, civil servants, health and safety activists, epidemiologists and academics took place throughout the conference. Informal gatherings such as the Welcome Dinner, the splendid lunches provided at the ABB institute and the very long bus journeys (!) offered ideal opportunities for relaxed discussions.

While at the Congress, I was delighted to hear discussions about new developments including:

**the founding of a quarterly Latin American journal on asbestos issues;**

**an asbestos conference on South American issues to be held in Buenos Aires in August, 2001;**

**plans for a new telephone hotline for asbestos and other occupational illness victims in**

**Japan;**

**cooperation between Italian delegates and UK specialists on a mesothelioma nursing program;**

**discussions between Slovenian and Italian health and safety activists on joint ventures;**

**the announcement of a joint medical initiative between the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York and the Osasco Hospital;**

**the stunning announcement by the Mayor of Osasco that he would encourage his city council to make Osasco one of the first cities in Brazil to ban the use of asbestos;**

**plans to launch anti-asbestos campaigns in Malaysia and India;**

**a statement signed by the trade unionists calling for an international ban on asbestos;**

**cooperation on compensation issues between South American and European lawyers;**

**an offer from São Paulo's House of Deputies to exhibit the South African photographic exhibition during the period when the state's ban asbestos law will be discussed;**

**the possibility of a consumer boycott of goods produced by companies which deny compensation to asbestos victims.**

It seemed that in every corner, at every table constructive discussions were taking place which would benefit asbestos victims. We were gratified to note a presence from thirty-two foreign countries at the Congress, including large delegations from South Africa, the UK, Japan, Italy, Canada, Australia and the USA. In addition to a huge number of Brazilian victims from Osasco, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Itapira and São Caetano do Sul, also in attendance were asbestos victims and their representatives from Trinidad & Tobago, Germany, China, India, Malaysia, Croatia, Slovenia, France, Holland, Argentina, Peru, Belgium, Ireland, Angola, Portugal, Mexico, Chile, Switzerland, Panama, Denmark, Finland, the Virgin Islands, Korea and New Zealand.

The Congress organisers are currently working on a Congress CD which will include many of the formal presentations; extra-Congress submissions will also be included as approved by the CD editors. A notice will appear on the IBAS website ([www.ibas.btinternet.co.uk](http://www.ibas.btinternet.co.uk) or [www.btinternet.com/~ibas](http://www.btinternet.com/~ibas)) when the CD is available. As work on the CD will take some time, the interim report which follows is a personal view of what transpired during the Congress. As one of the Congress organisers, I was often called out of the assembly hall and therefore missed some presentations. Their omission from these notes is not related to the standard of the material but only to my bad luck in having been called away. Fortunately, all the plenary sessions were videotaped. I hope to be receiving a full set of these videos (23 in all!) soon and will eagerly watch the sessions I missed.

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## **Four Days in Osasco**

**Sunday, September 17, 2000**

Most Congress delegates arrived in São Paulo on Friday and Saturday giving them time to settle in before the scheduled events began on Sunday. A trip to the headquarters of the Negritude Family Social Project, a group which aims to safeguard the rights of vulnerable children and teenagers, was the first time that Congress delegates assembled. It was astonishing to witness the

procession of so many well-known asbestos experts and advisers as they entered the assembly hall to hear a talk about the important work being done at the centre. The project, founded by one of Brazil's most popular music groups, currently offers help to 350 children. Fund-raising has begun and next year building work will commence so that soon, the project will be able to offer support and assistance to 3,500 children. Driving through Osasco, we were excited to see banners and billboards announcing the afternoon's concert and to pass by the familiar statue which had been used as the basis for the Congress logo.

Lunch at the restaurant Peña Don Fernando was our first clue as to the amazing flavours and aromas the local cuisine had to offer. If I tell you that the ribs I had were the best I had ever eaten, you may begin to get an inkling of how good the food was. The fish (did anyone ever find out what kind it was?) wrapped in palm leaves and baked in clay ovens was delicious. A colleague from Chile informed us that this food was typical of his country. All the while there was live music which lured many of our colleagues away from their delicious plates and onto the dance floor. The highlight of the day was the concert in "Tribute to the Asbestos Victims" at Osasco's Fito amphitheatre. From the stage Negritude Junior or Netinho as the screeching teenage girls called him, appealed for an international ban on the use of asbestos. Above the open-air stadium floated illuminated blimps with the names of the Congress organisers -- ABREA, IBAS and BAN Asbestos Network. The concert's firework finale climaxed with a sparkling display around the Congress slogan: Bastamianto!

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### **Monday, September 18, 2000**

The first day of the formal sessions began amidst bright sunshine. The distinctive blimps, magically moved overnight from the concert stadium to the theatre, the enormous Congress banner and the sign which greeted us at reception: Congresso Mundial do Amianto - Global Asbestos Congress left us in no doubt that we were in the right place.

The Congress was opened by Dr Silas Bortolosso, the Honorary President of the Congress and Mayor of Osasco. Welcoming delegates, he explained why the community of Osasco had felt it was important to host this event and why the municipality made its magnificent theatre available for the Congress. During the days of the Congress, the Mayor resolved that Osasco would be one of the first towns in Brazil to ban asbestos; this announcement overwhelmed local and foreign delegates. Asbestos, some forms of which are still legal in the United States, Japan, Australia and many other countries would be banned in Osasco! Dr. Paolo Mascarino, Mayor of Casale Monferrato, Italy which like Osasco has suffered an epidemic of asbestos-related disease, described the tragedies caused by asbestos in his town. Peter Skinner, a Member of the European Parliament who had been influential in steering the asbestos ban through the seemingly interminable EU committees, spoke about the need for the political will to achieve a ban. These comments were echoed by Deputy Eduardo Jorge a leader of the pro-ban forces in the Brazilian Federal Parliament. Also attending the opening session, was the politician who has written the bill to ban asbestos in the state of São Paulo. Fernanda Giannasi, Vice-President of the Congress, Annie Thébaud-Mony, representing the Ban Asbestos Network, and Laurie Kazan-Allen, for IBAS (International Ban Asbestos Secretariat) highlighted the importance of this opportunity for interaction amongst leading anti-asbestos campaigners, scientists, health and safety activists, plaintiffs' solicitors and others. Acknowledging that asbestos multinationals had, until now, controlled the flow of information, the speakers pointed out that this congress marked a turning point in the history of the international ban asbestos campaign. The solidarity and personal contacts made in Osasco would increase the access to information for asbestos victims in each of the countries represented at the Congress.

The photographic exhibition by Hein du Plessis which was displayed in the foyer of the theatre

focused on the catastrophe caused by decades of asbestos misuse in South Africa. These pictures graphically illustrated the suffering of asbestos workers, their families and the communities contaminated by fall-out from asbestos facilities. This exhibition, previously seen in London, Bristol, Warwick, Harrogate and Glasgow, had been brought to Osasco to reinforce the universality of the suffering caused by the killer dust. In his speech, Thabo Makweya, Minister of the Environment for the Provincial Parliament of the Northern Cape, South Africa (home to many of South Africa's asbestos victims) demanded justice for those injured by multinational corporations which exploited human beings mercilessly, denying responsibility for pain and suffering caused in the quest for larger profits and bigger dividends. The exhibition was opened by Dr Silas Bortolosso, Dr João de Souza Filho, President of the Congress and the Secretary of Health for Osasco, Gwen Mahlangu, a Minister from the South African Parliament and Minister Makweya. Shortly afterwards, Dr João de Souza Filho and Dr Steven Markowitz, from Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, announced that Dr Vilton Raile, a doctor from Osasco, had been appointed an Irving J. Selikoff Fellow in Occupational and Environmental Health. News that Vilton's participation in this project would begin in November, 2000 was greeted with a standing ovation. Over a period of two years, Vilton will have the opportunity to study clinical diagnosis and public health surveillance of asbestos-related disease in New York during three study trips; his work in Osasco will include the development of a professional education program for primary medical carers to increase awareness and improve diagnostic skills.

The need to condense the sessions into three days meant that it was necessary to schedule meetings of smaller groups simultaneously. Early Monday afternoon, delegates had the choice of three activities. Many ABREA members chose to attend the video session during which topics such as the effects of asbestos exposure, methods of prevention, the history of the medical/scientific debate, and the need to ban asbestos were covered in films from Brazil, Australia, France, Denmark, the USA and the UK. Competing activities included Round-table Discussion A (Strategies for Latin America and the Developing World to Ban Asbestos), Workshop A (Liability/ Compensation) and Workshop B (Epidemiology, Public Health and Sociological Research).

Often during the Congress it was difficult to choose which sessions to attend. Many of us wanted to be in two places at once. In many instances, deals were struck between colleagues: "you stay in the workshop till it ends (at 6 p.m.) and I'll go to the afternoon plenary session (which starts at 4 p.m.) - we'll compare notes later!" Monday's afternoon plenary session, Prevention: Asbestos Management, Identification, Maintenance or Removal, Contaminated Land, was chaired by Dr Barry Castleman. Nigel Bryson, Director of Health and the Environment at the UK's GMB Union, discussed his union's asbestos program and efforts to lobby government for a ban in the UK. Dr Peter Infante exposed the myth of controlled use by presenting data on exposure to asbestos in the US. He graphically made the point that if exposure to asbestos cannot be controlled in the US, what chance is there for it to be controlled in Brazil, China or India. Case studies which examined the situation in Prieska and Kuruman, South Africa and Libby, Montana, USA were salient reminders of the ability of governments and corporations to overlook the health and welfare of ordinary citizens. During her presentation, Rosana Pereira de Lima remarked on the similarities between what took place in Prieska, Kuruman, Libby and Itapira, a small town in the interior of São Paulo where amphibole antophyllite had been mined and widely used for over fifty years. Although production ceased when demand evaporated, levels of contamination in the mill and surrounding areas are still dangerously high.

You might think that after such a day, delegates were longing to crawl back to their hotel rooms and sleep. Our Brazilian hosts had other ideas. A welcome dinner at Maison St. Germain provided the perfect opportunity to unwind and to continue our discussions in more informal surroundings. We were treated to a performance of the capoeira, a most breath-taking spectacle

in which the participants dance while they fight. The split-second timing necessary to prevent serious injury was awesome. For the feminists present, it was rewarding to note the inclusion of girls in the capoeira troop! The warm atmosphere and the wonderful food (as well as new types of cocktails) made for a memorable evening.

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### **Tuesday, September 19, 2000**

Of all the plenary sessions, I had been most eager to hear the presentations scheduled for Tuesday morning: Social Activism: How Collective Strategies of Resistance Are Organized by Asbestos Victims and Anti-Asbestos Campaigners in Various Countries. Representatives from asbestos victims' support groups related the struggle and steps required to create organisations to represent asbestos victims in Brazil, Japan, Australia, Italy, Holland, Slovenia and the USA. Fernanda Giannasi, who had been sued (unsuccessfully) for criminal defamation by a Brazilian asbestos producer two years ago, presented the background to the formation of ABREA in 1995 and identified key areas in which ABREA was concentrating its efforts: securing special pension rights and accident benefit, gaining recognition of pleural plaques as an occupational disease and having extrajudicial agreements and cases judged to be inappropriate reviewed. ABREA is calling for: the creation of an assistance fund for asbestos victims, the setting up of a computerised database of registered cases and medical literature, increased cooperation with international groups, national and international partnership schemes with doctors and lawyers and the continuation of its campaign for an international ban on asbestos.

Sugio Furuya, from BANJAN (the Ban Asbestos Network in Japan), surprised many delegates when he told us that Japan's consumption of chrysotile remains high!! In 1999, Japan imported 117,143 tons, of which over 50% came from Canada, 21% from Zimbabwe, 11% from South Africa, 6% from the USA, 5% from Brazil, 4% from Russia with the balance coming from other countries. Typically over 90% is used for construction materials such as asbestos cement products. The first Japanese case of asbestosis was reported in 1937, of asbestos-related lung cancer in 1960 and mesothelioma in 1973. Nowadays, cases of asbestos-related disease are reported in shipyards, harbours, automobile plants, construction sites as well as asbestos factories. By comparison with the incidence of disease in the West, Japanese figures are low. Japanese experts believe this is "a result of lagging growth of asbestos consumption." It is predicted that the incidence of disease will soon catch up, and outstrip, that in Western countries.

BANJAN, set up in 1987, is supported by trade unions, citizen's groups, OSH groups and interested individuals. The group has concentrated on raising public awareness about hazards, mounting campaigns for stricter regulations and the introduction of safer substitutes, backing citizens' actions, supporting asbestos victims and demanding an immediate ban on asbestos. Compensation for asbestos disease in Japan is a complex issue. Civil litigation for such cases is rare with only seven personal injury claims having been initiated. Of these, six were settled out of court for sums ranging from US\$45,000-\$350,000. No product liability or environmental exposure cases have been brought. An important case is currently being litigated in which twelve former workers' and the families of four deceased workers from the U.S. Naval Shipyard Repair Facility are suing the Japanese government for a total of \$250,000,000 under clauses of the US-Japan Security Treaty.

Representatives from two organisations in Australia were invited to participate in this session. Conditions, history, legal and political climate and compensation laws and schemes vary so much within Australia, that the Asbestos Diseases Society (ADS) in Perth, Western Australia and the Asbestos Diseases Foundation in Sydney, New South Wales have evolved in very different ways. Robert Vojakovic of the ADS explained the history of Western Australia's crocidolite mine at Wittenoom and the devastation it has caused to Wittenoom workers and their

families. Many of the children who lived at Wittenoom have died in their thirties from mesothelioma. The company which insured the Wittenoom mine was the state insurance bureau so not only did the victims have to take on their former employer but they also had to fight the state government! Since its inception in 1979, the ADS has had close ties with the law firm of Slater and Gordon; together they have created many legal precedents favourable to asbestos victims. The ADS has a wide range of activities including: counselling and support services for the injured and their families, political lobbying, fundraising for medical research and support services and raising community awareness. Robert and his staff work closely with medical personnel at the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital; this teamwork results in improved access to expert medical care for victims.

Bob Ruers, a Member of the Dutch Parliament, a solicitor and a founding member of the Dutch Committee of Asbestos Victims, explained how since 1995 this group has helped to improve a situation in which the majority of Dutch asbestos victims were barred from claiming compensation. The committee, its lawyers and academics at the Delft University of Technology have worked to raise public and professional awareness of the problems. The number of personal injury cases has increased in recent years; six hundred lawsuits are currently pending. The availability of more and better information has led to a significant rise in the size of pain and suffering awards (\$50,000-\$80,000).

Recurring themes during the morning's presentations were:

**the need to work closely with local and national media;**

*a prime example of a such a relationship was that between ABREA and Nova Difusora, one of Osasco's most popular radio stations. This station covered the conference daily. It also broadcast several interviews with Congress organisers prior to the conference and provided free advertising for the concert in: "Tribute to the Asbestos Victims;"*

**the importance of cross organisational support - e.g. trade unions, occupational safety and health groups, law firms, university departments, political parties, etc.**

**the importance of close, personal relationships with advisors such as medical researchers and solicitors;**

*in Perth, the ADS has raised funds for pioneering research work being undertaken at the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital. The good relationship between ADS and medical staff mean that asbestos victims can bypass delays caused by bureaucracy;*

**personal commitment and family involvement of supporters produce maximum results for minimum financial outlay (few of the groups even mentioned the severe lack of financial resources; this was taken as a given by all!);**

**the need to raise public awareness, lobby national governments for anti-asbestos legislation, campaign for a global ban to prevent the transfer of hazardous technology from the first to the third world was recognised.**

Time and again, speakers said that sheer determination not to give up in the face of seemingly overwhelming opposition had been paramount in the struggle to achieve their goals.

Asbestos victims are well aware of the obstacles they face. Dr Castleman's paper: Controversies at International Organisations over Asbestos Industry Influence confirmed the widely shared belief that there are no depths to which industry will not sink to protect the status quo. Barry showed how Canadian government officials and representatives of the asbestos industry have

pressurized international scientific organizations, including the International Program on Chemical Safety, the World Health Organization and the International Labor Office, to ensure that only reports favourable to industry were published. He reveals a "pattern of improprieties, often involving the same individuals and tactics..."

While Round-Table Discussion B: Asbestos Victims Speak-Out! was being held in the main hall, Workshop C: Asbestos-Related Diseases, Diagnosis, Pathology, Treatment and Experimental Studies (Gene Therapy) and Round-Table discussion C: Trade Unions and Asbestos: Old Problems and New Solutions were taking place in the ABB Conference Centre. More than sixty delegates from twenty countries attended the trade union round-table. Unions represented included Brazil's CONTICON/CUT, CISSOR and FENATEST/CNTC, the Canadian Autoworkers Union, the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers, the UK'S General and Municipal Boilermakers' Union, the International Federation of Journalists and Italy's CGIL: Centrale Generale Italiana del Lavoro (General Italian Labour Union). One delegate commented that this was "a classic example of how trade unionists can network internationally in order that real goals could be achieved. General Secretaries of Unions discussed with rank and file members practical solutions to this major problem." The trade unionists agreed on a statement (see attached) which highlights: the need for a global ban, the role of unions in protecting their members from exposure to asbestos, obtaining compensation for those already injured and raising awareness, the need for international links and the importance of "a Just Transition to protect the income, employment and welfare of those affected (by job losses) and their communities."

The afternoon's plenary session was another very full session with eight speakers describing compensation regimes ranging from archaic to modern, based on product and/or employer liability, characterized by civil litigation or government compensation and recognising environmental, occupational or para-occupational exposure. Brazilian lawyer, Leonardo Amarante, who works closely with ABREA, explained the difficulties injured workers face in obtaining compensation. As always, the long latency period creates terrible problems with many people having discarded crucial documents in the decades between exposure and illness. Leonardo told us that 300 cases are now proceeding through the judicial process. He was hopeful that a landmark award of US\$250,000 from the lower court to the family of a deceased truck driver who had transported asbestos for one of Saint Gobain's subsidiaries would be upheld on appeal. The audience was astonished to learn from Annie Thébaud-Mony that parts of the French compensation system date back to 1919! ANDEVA, France's national asbestos victims group, and the associations' lawyers have been successful in several recent test cases including that of Michel Drouet, a mesothelioma patient from Cherbourg, who received \$163,000 from a government panel for occupational exposure experienced during service in the French Navy. Other successful verdicts include findings that corporate defendants were guilty of "faute inexcusable" (inexcusable fault); this verdict more than doubles the size of compensation awarded by the court or tribunal. More than two hundred claims brought by ANDEVA members for "faute inexcusable" have succeeded. The results of civil actions for domestic and environmental contamination have been less positive.

As in many countries, delays in civil litigation in the Netherlands disadvantage mesothelioma victims. To streamline the compensation process, the Institute of Asbestos Victims (IAV) was set up earlier this year. This initiative was the culmination of years of lobbying and campaigning by the Dutch Committee of Asbestos Victims. Only mesothelioma patients with traceable employers/insurers whose exposure occurred within the thirty year limitation period can apply to the IAV which aims to resolve claims within four months. To bring a claim before the IAV, individuals must renounce the right to bring a civil action. Mesothelioma victims disqualified from making an IAV claim, can apply to the Government Asbestos Institute (GAI), a tripartite

body which administers a national compensation scheme. There is a huge discrepancy in the levels of compensation available from the two sources with average settlements of 90,000-100,000 guilders (\$45-\$50,000) being awarded by the IAV and 35,000 guilders (\$17,700) by the GAI. By comparison, compensation from a civil case could be somewhere in the region of 135,000 guilders (\$68,000). Neither the IAV nor the GAI will compensate asbestosis or lung cancer victims. In 1999, litigation prospects for people with asbestos-related lung cancer improved with a Dutch verdict that awarded damages to a former smoker. Since that decision, defendants and insurance companies appear more willing to settle these claims.

Dr Audrey Banyini, a South African civil servant, explained the frustrations she experiences administering a government scheme which is unable to deliver the level of compensation that asbestos victims require. Richard Meeran, the London lawyer who has been representing 3,000 South African asbestos victims in their claim against Cape plc, formerly the UK's second largest asbestos group, explained that a ruling by the House of Lords on July 20, 2000 meant that the cases can now proceed through the UK courts. Justice Buckley's opinion (June, 1999) that these issues are "overwhelmingly matters in which the South African jurisdiction has far greater interests," was voided by the five Law Lords who found that if the litigation were to be returned to the South African jurisdiction "the probability is that the plaintiffs would have no means of obtaining the professional representation and the expert evidence which would be essential if these claims were to be justly decided. This would amount to a denial of justice." The afternoon session was concluded by a book launch of a special conference edition of the book: *Victims of the Workplace: Breaking the Silence*. A joyful performance of *Familia Negritude* and 100% COHAB ended the day's proceedings on a musical note. Afterwards, a cocktail reception in the theatre lobby for Congress delegates, guests and victims featured in the book was provided by The Metal Workers Union from Osasco.

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### **Wednesday, September 20, 2000**

With a very full program planned for the morning session, it was almost possible to ignore the fact that the Congress was drawing to a close. For many of us the experience and daily exposure to others whose lives are involved with asbestos issues in one way or another was a revelation, opening up new dimensions and avenues for exploration. Over breakfast, I had the chance to hear Dr Audrey Banyini's personal experiences of dealing with asbestos problems in South Africa. During bus journeys from the hotel to the municipal theatre, I learned about new problems facing ANDEVA, the French asbestos group, from Josette Roudaire and Helene Boulot. At the welcome dinner Peter Skinner MEP discussed new developments in Brussels while Nigel Bryson from the GMB spoke about his plans for a Parliamentary Seminar. For many years, I have been unsuccessful in obtaining information on asbestos issues in India. During the intervals, Harsh Jaitli from New Dehli was very informative on this subject and has, since the Congress, sent me many useful documents.

The morning session: Social-Medical Aspects was chaired by Dr. Christine Oliver who managed to keep the crowded agenda running to time. Dr Gurnam Basran kicked off the session by describing the insidious way in which asbestos dust causes pleural plaques, lung cancer, asbestosis and mesothelioma. According to Gurnam, the British Thoracic Society is currently preparing a paper on mesothelioma which will, hopefully, provide useful guidelines on diagnosis and management of this terrible disease. A Brazilian colleague, Dr. Jefferson Freitas explained the difficulty in diagnosing pleural plaques and the refusal of the Brazilian authorities to accept that pleural plaques are an occupational condition. The pioneering work of Mavis Robinson, a specialist cancer nurse from Leeds, generated much discussion and approval; an Italian colleague commented that her program was much better than the one being planned in his region. Since



July, 1999 Mavis has provided a telephone help-line for asbestos victims and their carers; an analysis of enquiries revealed that the majority of patients needed more detailed clinical information than they had been given by their doctors. A significant number of calls was received from nurses requesting information to help their asbestos patients. A booklet: Information for Mesothelioma Patients and Their Carers is available from the Leeds office. Establishing a network of specialist nurses with knowledge about asbestos diseases is another part of Mavis' work. To date, thirty-four nurses have attended training days; these nurses are committed to training colleagues in regional hospitals and clinics.

Rose Marie Vojakovic from Perth explained how the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia (ADS) helps to support the families of asbestos victims. She spoke of the emotional responses engendered by knowledge of these diseases: anger, fear and isolation. Rose Marie explained that social events, such as picnics, meetings and informational talks, provide the opportunity for victims and their families to talk with others in similar situations. The presence of a nurse and counsellor at the ADS offices enables easy and informal access to expert help. Anti-asbestos campaigners are often criticised by workers who believe that a ban on asbestos will lead to a loss of employment. Rory O'Neill, editor of Workers Health International Newsletter (WHIN) and Hazards magazine, exposed the fallacy of this argument in his talk: Just Transition: Safe Jobs not No Jobs. The asbestos industry and asbestos technology are old and coming to the end of their cycle. Investment is needed to assist affected areas and develop clean industries. Governments and trade unions must take the lead in demonstrating that there are alternative industries which generate employment but do not result in serious illness and death.

Dr. Geoffrey Tweedale, author of Magic Mineral to Killer Dust, described how a British company exported death to thousands in the form of: Sprayed Limpet Asbestos. This fireproofing material was used on a cinema in Rio de Janeiro which has recently experienced a highly publicized decontamination. Women's exposure during the mining of asbestos was the focus of Dr Joch McCulloch's presentation: Mining Asbestos in South Africa: Miners, Capital and the State.

During the first hour of the afternoon session, three speakers looked towards the future. Fernanda Giannasi described the steps which were being planned by ABREA to encourage Federal and State Deputies to back legislation for a ban. She spoke eloquently about the suffering asbestos had caused and urged all the delegates present to return to their countries committed to ending this scourge. She added: "The Mayor of Osasco will ban asbestos, isn't it time that others followed his lead? The USA? Japan? Canada?" Lars Vedsmand presented a videotape of the well-known Danish film: The Big Clean-Up, with a Portuguese soundtrack, to Fernanda. Denmark, which had long ago banned asbestos, was still experiencing an epidemic of asbestos disease. On September 18, the first day of the Congress, the World Trade Organization (WTO) announced that it was upholding a French ban on the import of Canadian chrysotile. Barry Castleman discussed the process by which the WTO had reached this decision, highlighting such controversial issues as the lack of transparency, secretive selection of scientific experts and the unacceptable role played by faceless bureaucrats in the decision-making process. Barry warned that: "Just because the WTO system barely worked to preserve public health measures in this case doesn't mean it can be counted on to do so in many other cases."

During the conference debate, many delegates had the opportunity to speak from the floor: Daniel Berman demanded that Stephan Schmidheiny, the former owner of the Swiss Eternit group, be called to account for the pain and suffering his company has caused; Eternit's factory in Osasco formerly employed many of ABREA's members. Dianna Lyons responded to Fernanda's comment that the USA had still not banned asbestos, promising to write to both US Presidential candidates. Applauding the success of this Congress, a leader of the Osasco branch

of the Chemical Workers Trade Union said that similar meetings should be held for other harmful products. Luiz Valente, an engineer from the Secretary of Health in São Paulo, commented on the sale of talc contaminated with amphiboles in Brazil. Fernanda Giannasi highlighted the huge problem of accessing accurate and reliable Brazilian data on asbestos diseases. Investigations by Fernanda, Annie Thébaud-Mony and Lucila Scavone into thirty-three mesothelioma deaths have revealed no useful information on the death certificates. Fernanda asked lawyers to help asbestos victims from developing countries find strategies to sue multinational corporations in their home countries. The same companies caused the same diseases in many countries; asbestos victims in Brazil, Chile, India and elsewhere are entitled to the same consideration and compensation as victims in the developed world.

Dr Jerry Abraham said that he had never been to a conference where the final session was as well attended as the first. When the Award Ceremony began at 5 p.m. the theatre was full. Three international awards were presented by the Congress for outstanding effort and dedication. Each award was presented in the name of an asbestos sufferer.

### **The Ray Sentes Award:**

The Ray Sentes Award was presented by Kyla Sentes, Ray's younger daughter. Her speech brought tears to the eyes of many delegates. She spoke movingly of her Father and his struggle with asbestosis, a disease which was to end his life on April 13, 2000. By coincidence, the day of the presentation would have been Ray's 57th birthday. Kyla said: "I can think of no better way to honour his memory than for all of us here to celebrate his life and his work with this award. And I can think of no better recipient than a man for whom Dad not only held a tremendous amount of respect, but whom he was happy to call his friend, Barry Castleman." As a graduate student Barry began work on his book: *Asbestos: Medical and Legal Aspects*. This book is now in its fourth edition and has become, what many in the movement believe, the bible of the anti-asbestos campaign. Barry is a stalwart defender of asbestos victims and has helped thousands of injured people obtain compensation throughout the United States. He has travelled extensively, meeting and advising representatives from asbestos victims' groups in many countries; he was an important member of the European Union's legal team in the defence of the French ban on chrysotile.

### **The June Hancock Award:**

Mavis Robinson told the audience about June Hancock, an unassuming and dignified Yorkshire woman who took on and beat a huge multinational corporation. June, like her Mother before her, had contracted mesothelioma having lived near one of Turner & Newall's asbestos factories. When she won her case, June told reporters: "No matter how small you are, you can fight and no matter how big you are, you can lose." On August 30, the June Hancock Award was presented to Henri Pezerat, who was unable to make the long trip from France to Brazil. For over twenty-five years, Henri had been a voice in the wilderness. As a toxicologist, he faced a reality which the French government, trade unions and public ignored. Henri is a dedicated scientist and campaigner who identified a problem and persisted in his efforts to achieve compensation for asbestos victims and protection for society from this deadly fibre.

### **The Hendrik Afrika Award:**

Hendrik Afrika lives in Prieska, South Africa, a community in which asbestos-related disease is common. Hendrik had hoped to come to Osasco; his ticket had been collected and his passport had been applied for. Unfortunately, Hendrik's health deteriorated and he was unable to travel. The choice of Hendrik's name for this award was symbolic. Hendrik's is the first name of 3,000 names on the class action against Cape PLC, the UK asbestos company which operated in

Prieska and which is currently being sued for compensation for the occupational and environmental damage suffered by Prieska's residents. Thabo Makweya, the Environment Minister from the Northern Cape Province (which includes Prieska), made a stunning speech in which he called for a moment of silence in memory of all asbestos victims. Presenting the Hendrik Afrika Award to Fernando José Chierici, the first President of ABREA and an asbestos victim himself, the Minister declared: "Comrade Fernando José Chierici for all of us and those other iron men and women in your state, you make us proud. It is with pride that the whole congress accords you on behalf of all other asbestos sufferers this gift of honour and respect. Your tenacity, perseverance, courage and gift of life makes you immortal."

**Other presentations:**

Engraved pewter beer tankards were presented in gratitude to: Dr Silas Bortolosso, the Mayor of Osasco and Honorary President of the Congress, Dr José Amando Mota, President of the Council of the City of Osasco, and Dr João de Souza Filho, Osasco's Secretary of Health and President of the Congress. An engraved silver photograph frame was presented to: Fernanda Giannasi, the Congress' Vice-President and driving force.

The auditorium was now full with delegates, ABREA members, their families, office staff from the Ministry of Health who had worked for months on the Congress arrangements (thanks Rosana, Carminda, Raquel, Daniel, Beto, Chaves, Guidotti), school-children and members of the community. Even Chen, our beloved Chen, finally started to relax. Chen who had worked with the Congress organisers for many months had shared our ups and downs, panic attacks and on-site emergencies. Chen and his team were superb in ensuring the smooth-running of the Congress - we love you Chen! The Congress ended as it began with a vibrant display of Brazilian music and dance by the Familia Negritude and 100% COHAB. The auditorium roared with approval and applause as the children's performance concluded the Congress. With these notes ringing in our ears, we adjourned down the road for one (or two?) caipirinhas (a Brazilian cocktail - crushed lime, sugar and ice cubes mixed with cachaça-- if you haven't tried it, you haven't lived!) and a last taste of churrasco, Brazilian barbecue (amazing!).

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