

This monograph is not simply a muckraking tale of corporate malfeasance and government complicity although some may choose to interpret it as such. The contributions in this publication document a long-standing and total disregard for the consequences of industrialization and the accompanying corruption of a political system eager to accommodate the requirements of vested interests at the expense of workers and the poorer sectors of society. Although the focus of this report is on asbestos, the same practices and patterns of behavior can be discerned elsewhere in India's rapidly developing economy.

An expensive, multi-faceted campaign has been mounted by the asbestos sector to create a climate in which the use of its tainted products can flourish: a generous advertising budget has ensured that pro-asbestos infomercials and articles appear regularly throughout the media, corporate contributions to research projects buy access to government studies, retainers to high-powered lawyers affect the outcome of public interest litigation initiated by workers and at-risk communities and donations to electoral campaigns encourage politicians at local and national levels to do industry's bidding.

The marketing efforts of India's asbestos lobby are coordinated with those of other national stakeholders. Delegates

representing the Indian government have, on at least three occasions, helped to block efforts by the Rotterdam Convention to impose a modicum of regulation on the global trade in chrysotile asbestos. As we approach the October 2008 discussions of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention, there is little doubt about India's allegiance to the pro-asbestos faction that will, out of ruthless self-interest, veto efforts to include chrysotile on the Prior Informed Consent list. By exposing the Rotterdam Convention as a paper tiger, asbestos stakeholders will not only sound the death knell for a well-meaning multi-lateral agreement but also condemn millions of people to ill-health and premature death caused by avoidable exposures to a range of hazardous chemicals and pesticides.

Commerce without morality, science without humanity and politics without principle are amongst the deadly sins identified by the venerated Mahatma Gandhi. If, India is to keep faith with its own heritage, its citizens and populations throughout the developing world, it must become part of the solution and not the problem. Once the government has acknowledged the unacceptable hazard that asbestos poses and bans its use, the way is open for India to play a leading role in encouraging other nations in the region to do likewise. An asbestos-free future is possible!



*Rocking the boat - Canadian masterclass*