

Pacific island intervention on listing of chrysotile asbestos in Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention

Delivered by Ms Lupe Matoto, representing Tonga.

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I am speaking today as a representative of all the Pacific island country parties to the Rotterdam Convention – Cook Islands, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa and Tonga – along with the Republic of Kiribati all of whom are present at this Conference of the Parties.

We would like to speak in one Pacific voice to address this very important matter.

In the Pacific region we knew very little about the presence of legacy and new asbestos in our islands until quite recently.

A 2014 Pacific regional asbestos survey found more than 187,000 square metres of confirmed non-residential asbestos across 11 Pacific island countries.

The survey also found new building materials containing chrysotile asbestos on sale in the shops.

The Pacific region lacks the resources to be able to deal, independently, with the safe removal and secure transport of asbestos waste and the influx of new building materials containing chrysotile asbestos.

Low awareness rates of the dangers posed by chrysotile asbestos - combined with the threat of natural disasters which are growing in both intensity and frequency as a result of climate change - mean that our workforce and communities are at risk of asbestos-related illnesses.

Pacific island Parties to the Rotterdam Convention want to know – and NEED to know – when materials containing chrysotile asbestos are coming into our islands so that we can take appropriate measures to protect our communities.

For this reason, Cook Islands, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Kiribati and Tonga strongly support the proposed listing of chrysotile asbestos on Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention.