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OPEN LETTER TO PAT DAVIDSON, MP

September 14, 2009

Pat Davidson, MP
Sarnia-Lambton, ON

Dear Ms Davidson:

We are writing to express to you our deep thanks and respect for speaking up and publicly stating that you do not support the mining and export of asbestos (Sarnia Observer, Shawn Jeffords, August 21, 2009).

As the MP for Sarnia-Lambton, where your constituents have paid and continue to pay the terrible human costs of asbestos related harm, it would be morally impossible for you to support continued export of asbestos to unsuspecting people in the developing world. We recognize that your public stand against asbestos use is motivated by compassion and ethics, qualities that are not always readily found in a world where political expediency sadly frequently trumps doing what is right.

We also realize that you are possibly being subjected to great pressure to make you to back down from your clear, moral stand opposing export of asbestos and to silence yourself. We plead with you to not succumb to such pressure. We appeal to you to show courage and integrity and stay firm in your position. Canada should not have a double standard and it is indefensible for us to export to developing countries a substance that we do not use ourselves because we know it is deadly.

We also call on you to oppose funding of the Chrysotile Institute which, as detailed below, is working to sabotage a U.N. Convention that protects people in the developing world from harm from asbestos. We are sure that you support this U.N. environmental Convention that provides the basic human right of prior informed consent regarding a hazardous substance like chrysotile asbestos.

As you know well, the science is irrefutable that chrysotile asbestos (which represents 100% of the asbestos sold in the world today) is a deadly carcinogen that causes mesothelioma and other cancers, as well as asbestosis. Public health authorities in Quebec, across Canada and around the world, as well as U.N. agencies, have all called for an end to the use of chrysotile asbestos since even in a technically advanced, wealthy country like Canada, it has been clearly proven that chrysotile asbestos cannot be safely used. For this reason, the Quebec government's National Public Health Institute has, in fact, taken the position of recommending against the government's policy of increased use of chrysotile asbestos.

If you have not already done so, we urge you to watch the recent CBC documentary, *Canada's Ugly Secret*, aired on The National on June 10, 2009, which showed the appalling conditions under which Canada's asbestos is used in India. Here is the link to watch the documentary - http://www.cbc.ca/national/blog/video/healtheducation/canadas_ugly_secret.html

Only industry-funded institutions such as the Chrysotile Institute, which is a registered lobbyist for the asbestos industry, promote chrysotile asbestos and claim, against all independent evidence, that it can be safely used.

A key lobbying campaign of the Chrysotile Institute over the past several years has been to get the Canadian government to prevent the listing of chrysotile asbestos as a hazardous substance under the Rotterdam Convention. Regrettably, their lobby campaign has been successful. This means that the industry can sell asbestos to developing countries without being required to inform them that it is hazardous. Instead, the Chrysotile Institute misinforms them that it can be safely used. This is advantageous for sales, but a blot on Canada's reputation in the world.

In Canada, chrysotile asbestos is classified as a hazardous substance under Canadian law in order to protect Canadians. Yet the Chrysotile Institute, and unfortunately, also Prime Minister Harper refuse to allow people in the developing world this same basic human right to be informed about a substance that can harm and kill you. This double standard, in our opinion, is morally indefensible and brings Canada into extreme disrepute internationally.

The Canadian Cancer Society has urgently called on Prime Minister Harper to implement the following plan of action in order to help eliminate asbestos related diseases across Canada and around the world:

- Immediately set a clear timetable for phasing out the use and export of asbestos;
- Implement a national surveillance system to track health outcomes of people who have been exposed to asbestos;
- Create a public registry of buildings that contain asbestos;
- Provide transition support for affected communities
- Include chrysotile asbestos on the Rotterdam Convention's list of hazardous substances

We are very glad to know that you wrote strong letters to Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq and Natural Resources Minister Lisa Raitt, informing them that you do not support the government's policy of exporting asbestos, and that you received a sympathetic response from Minister Raitt, together with her assurance that she will bring up the asbestos issue at an upcoming meeting of cabinet.

We offer you our full support for your efforts to change the government's policy on asbestos. We would like to work with you on this matter and to be kept fully informed of any developments. We look forward, in particular, to knowing when Minister Raitt will be bringing up the asbestos issue at a cabinet meeting.

We have also written to Dona Cadman, MP, expressing to her our thanks and support for her courageous, compassionate and ethical stand to end asbestos mining and export. Ms Cadman has given us her assurance that she stands firmly committed to supporting legislation to ban asbestos. We have informed her of our wish to work with you and her on this important public health issue.

We look forward to receiving your reply and, once again, express our thanks and our respect.

Yours sincerely,



Kathleen Ruff, Rideau Institute on International Affairs, on behalf of:

* Dr Kapil Khatter, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment

* Diana Daghofer, Prevent Cancer Now

- * Stephen Hazell, Sierra Club of Canada
- * Lisa Gue, David Suzuki Foundation
- * Denis St-Jean, Public Service Alliance of Canada
- * Dr Fernand Turcotte, Professor Emeritus of Public Health, Faculté de Médecine, Université Laval, Québec
- * Dr Pierre L. Auger, MD, Msc, FRCPC, Professeur de clinique, Département de médecine sociale et Préventive, Université Laval, Québec
- * Dr Murray Finkelstein, PhD MD CCFP, Dept. of Family and Community Medicine, Mt Sinai Hospital, Toronto
- * Dr John Last, MD, DPH, FRCPC, FFPH, FACPM, FACE, Emeritus Professor of Epidemiology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ottawa
- * Dr Pierre Gosselin, MD MPH, Professeur adjoint de clinique, Département de médecine sociale et préventive, Faculté de médecine, Université Laval, Québec
- * Dr Ray Bustinza, Chargé d'enseignement de clinique, Université Laval, Québec
- * Dr Yv Bonnier Viger, Médecin spécialiste en santé communautaire, Adjoint au Directeur de santé publique de Chaudière-Appalaches, Professeur au département de médecine sociale & préventive, Université Laval, Québec
- * Dr Tim K. Takaro, MD, MPH, MS., Associate Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University
- * Dr Michael Byers, Canada Research Chair in Global Politics and International Law, University of British Columbia
- * Alec Farquhar, Managing Director, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers
- * Larry Stoffman, United Food & Commercial Workers Union, BC
- * Dr Micheline Beaudry, professeure titulaire associée, Département des sciences des aliments et de nutrition, FSAA, Université Laval, Québec
- * Albert Le Monnier, International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Canada
- * Fe de Leon, Canadian Environmental Law Association
- * Dr James Brophy, adjunct Assistant Professor, University of Windsor
- * Dr Margaret Keith, adjunct Assistant Professor, University of Windsor
- * Ramsey Hart, MiningWatch Canada
- * Darryl Walker, British Columbia Government and Service Employees Union
- * Cathy Walker, Toxic Free Canada
- * Larry Hubich, Saskatchewan Federation of Labour
- * Rosa Goldstein, Victoria Raging Grannies, BC