

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

Canada's leadership role on the world stage is threatened by its historic position of promoting asbestos. Now that asbestos is banned in dozens of countries around the world, and it is being carefully removed from government buildings in Capital Hill in Ottawa, it is reasonable that precautions be implemented in international commerce in asbestos. The U.N. Rotterdam Convention provides that prior informed consent (PIC) be required for products that are banned in different parts of the world as ultra-hazardous, and asbestos is on the agenda for inclusion on the list of materials requiring PIC to buyers of asbestos in the international marketplace. This is a basic, minimal step that has been accepted for many other toxic substances. Opposition to inclusion of asbestos for PIC listing has been led by Canada.

I am writing, as a friend of Canada, to say that the good name of Canada is being dragged through the mud over asbestos. The less than 1000 fulltime jobs left in Canada's asbestos mining industry (there is no asbestos-using industry left in Canada) are not a continuing justification for dumping asbestos on the poor countries of the world. Alternatives of retraining these workers and cleaning up the environment where asbestos has been mined in Quebec are more appropriate for the new century. Though the Canadian media have not been very alert to Canada's debacles in losing at the WTO and sending its propagandists all over the world to downplay the dangers of asbestos, this story is picking up attention in other countries.

A major conference on asbestos is being organized by unions on September 12 in New Delhi. Canada's role in exporting asbestos and the Canadian scientist being trotted out to defend asbestos will receive appropriate scrutiny, and strong media attendance is expected. It is expected that asbestos will cause 5-10 million deaths just from projected trends, and a global ban on asbestos has been urged by numerous respected international groups. The time has come for Canada to cease being the Great Satan of asbestos in the world.

Sincerely,  
Barry Castleman