

ASIAN SOLIDARITY DELEGATION TO QUÉBEC

Press Release: December 15, 2010

Strict safety standards will apply to only 0.1% of use of Québec's asbestos overseas, Minister Gignac admits to Asian Solidarity Delegation

The Québec government has no intention of ensuring "rigorous safety protections" are in place for 99.9% of the life of the asbestos that the Jeffrey mine would export to developing countries, Québec's minister of Economic Development, Clément Gignac, has admitted to the Asia-Québec Solidarity Delegation. The details of the minister's position are noted in the attached letter.

Minister Gignac has promised that the Québec government will not give the \$58 million financing demanded by the anonymous consortium of foreign investors to open the Jeffrey mine, unless there is a guarantee that a system of rigorous health protections, equal to those of Québec, will be observed in India and the other Asian countries where the Jeffrey mine would export its asbestos.

Gignac confirmed to the Asian delegation that he is speaking of only 0.1% of the use of Québec's asbestos in the developing world. He washed his hands of the following activities, which constitute 99.9% of the life of Québec's asbestos overseas and are so hazardous that they are illegal in Québec itself, but are common in developing countries:

- cutting and breaking asbestos-cement construction products with a saw, without any protection
- using broken pieces of asbestos-cement, without any protection
- demolishing and renovating asbestos-containing buildings, without any protection
- living amongst asbestos-cement debris after a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, without any protection

Neither the minister nor the six experts who accompanied him were able to answer the five critical questions that the delegation posed to him.

"We are scandalized by the lack of due diligence displayed by minister Gignac," said Sugio Furuya, occupational health expert in Japan and leader of the delegation. "If it were his family that would be exposed to this hazardous, carcinogenic product, he

would not be so casual and uncaring. He would not wash his hands of the serious health risks. We are certain about this.”

“Why do our lives count for so little in the eyes of the minister and the government of Québec?” asked Omana George, expert in occupational health issues in India. “Mr Gignac recognized that in our countries, the asbestos exported by Québec is used in ways that are so hazardous as to be illegal in Québec itself. Québec has the resources necessary to protect the lives of its citizens. The minister knows that we do not have those resources in our countries. But does he care?”

“Around the world, people are scandalized that the government of Québec is considering financing a consortium of investors to export to developing countries millions of tonnes of a product that is so hazardous that neither Québec nor any industrialized country will use it,” said Anup Srivastava of the Building and Woodworkers International.

The Asian delegation dismissed as worthless M. Gignac’s excuse that Russia would continue to export asbestos if Québec stopped. “Québec is, in fact, the biggest asset Russia has in selling asbestos,” said Yeyong Choi, a health activist from Korea. “Québec is the key global propagandist putting forward the misinformation that asbestos will not harm health in the developing world. Without this deception, backed by the Québec government, Russia would find it much harder to sell its asbestos.”

“Furthermore,” added Muchamad Darisman, an occupational health activist in Indonesia, “if another country is exporting land mines, would that justify Québec exporting land mines?”

“We call on the government of Québec to listen to its own medical authorities and to put human life ahead of political interests,” said Kazumi Yoshizaki, whose father died from asbestos. “Show integrity and human compassion, Premier Charest. Do not finance the Jeffrey mine.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Kathleen Ruff, spokesperson, Asia-Québec Solidarity Delegation: (250) 847-1848;

kruff@bulkley.net

Sugio Furuya, leader, Asia-Québec Solidarity Delegation: +81-3-3636-3882;

2009aban@gmail.com