

Asbestos Victims Support Groups' Forum UK

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Pierre Boulanger
Agent-General, Québec Government Offices
59 Pall Mall
London SW1Y5JH

9th December 2010

Re: New Asbestos Mine in Québec

Dear Pierre Boulanger:

I am writing on behalf of the asbestos victims support groups listed below, and the many hundreds of asbestos victims we support each year.

We are extremely upset to learn that the government of Québec is considering the provision of a \$58 million loan guarantee to an anonymous consortium of investors so that they can open a new asbestos mine in the town of Asbestos. If this financial arrangement is put in place, over 5 million tonnes of asbestos will be exported from the Jeffrey mine to countries in the Global South, particularly in Asia, over the next quarter century.

Québec's medical and health authorities oppose this mine project and have called on the Québec government to stop the mining and export of asbestos, saying that these activities are medically unacceptable.

The World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and the International Trade Union Confederation, formerly known as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) which represents 176 million workers in 151 countries, have all called for an end to the use of all forms of asbestos, including chrysotile asbestos. The International Agency for Research on Cancer has repeatedly stated that exposure to all forms of asbestos, including chrysotile, can cause debilitating and fatal diseases.¹

The United Kingdom is in the midst of its worst ever industrial epidemic; more than 4,000 people are dying every year in our country from asbestos-related diseases. The majority of these people were exposed to Canadian asbestos. Even though the UK took the sensible step and banned asbestos in 1999, hazardous exposures to

¹ ILO policy. Statement September 6, 2010

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---safework/documents/genericdocument/wcms_144446.pdf

WHO policy. New Asbestos Fact Sheet. August 1, 2010

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs343/en/index.html>

ICFTU Resolution on Global Asbestos Ban. 2005.

http://www.icftu.org/www/pdf/statements/124EB_E_12_a_Asbestos%20%20EB%20resolution%20%20FINAL.pdf

International Agency for Research on Cancer. IARC Expands List of Diseases Related to Asbestos. 2009

http://www.thelancet.com/oncology/Vol_10_May_2009_pages_453-454

asbestos-contaminated products contained within the country's infrastructure continue.

Having experienced the tragic human consequences of exposure to asbestos on such a colossal scale, we urge your Government to use its resources and energy to: bring an end to the province's production of asbestos; decontaminate the asbestos mining towns, and; provide alternative employment for those people and communities affected by the shutting down of the asbestos mines.

On November 17, 2010, questions were posed in Parliament by Jim Sheridan MP, the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Asbestos Sub-Committee, to Alan Duncan, the Minister of State, Department for International Development, about the implications of Québec's plans to develop the new asbestos mine. Sheridan warned the House that the loan guarantee could result in "millions of tonnes of asbestos being dumped on unsuspecting populations in the years to come." The Minister agreed to raise this issue with the Foreign Office and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.²

In 1967, Charles DeGaulle speaking in Montreal extolled the virtues of La Belle Province when he said: "Vive le Québec libre!" (Long live free Québec). We too wish the residents of Québec a healthy and prosperous future – one which does not include the production and export of asbestos. To paraphrase DeGaulle, we would conclude by saying: "Vive le Québec libre d'amiante" (Long live asbestos-free Québec)

We request that you transmit our correspondence to Premier Charest and other members of your Government as a matter of utmost urgency. We urgently await his reply.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Whitston, Chair of the Forum of Asbestos Victims' Support Groups UK

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Asbestos Action Tayside; Asbestos Support West Midlands; Barrow Asbestos Related Disease Support; Bradford Asbestos Victim Support Group; Cheshire Asbestos Victims Support Group; Clydebanks Asbestos Group; Derbyshire Asbestos Support Team; Greater Manchester Asbestos Victims Support Group; Hampshire Asbestos Support & Awareness Group; Merseyside Asbestos Victims Support Group; North-West Wales Asbestos Victims Support Group; North East Asbestos Support & Awareness Group, Ridings Asbestos Support & Awareness Group, Sheffield And Rotherham Asbestos Group

² <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/chan73.pdf>