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January 23, 2009

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

We are profoundly disturbed that your government plans to continue to fund the Chrysotile Institute in the new federal budget. It is our view as Canadian experts in epidemiology and occupational medicine and as public health advocates that the Chrysotile Institute is endangering public health by disseminating misleading and untruthful information about chrysotile asbestos, especially in the world's emerging economies.

95% of Canada's chrysotile asbestos is exported to developing countries where it continues to be used in construction. It is primarily mixed there with cement, a practice now banned in other parts of the world. The Institute puts forward the nonsensical, unsubstantiated claim that chrysotile asbestos disappears when it is mixed with cement and consequently becomes harmless not only now, but for all time to come. This distorted, out-of-date and out-of-context information is quite contrary to that from leading scientific institutions - such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH), and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) regarding the health risks of chrysotile asbestos. These institutions, as well as the overwhelming worldwide scientific consensus, have called for chrysotile asbestos to be banned.

The Chrysotile Institute censors reports from respected scientific bodies around the world, including Canada and Quebec itself, which state that chrysotile asbestos is a deadly carcinogen and that there is no safe use possible in the construction environment in developing countries. The Institute's misleading propaganda is financed, in large part, by the Canadian federal government. It is a slur on the reputation of the scientific community and people of Canada for the government to be funding such censorship and perversion of scientific information. But, this is a far more serious matter than a slur on our country's scientific integrity. People's lives continue to be put at risk if they put their trust in the Chrysotile Institute's information.

It is not only inappropriate, for public health reasons, for government to sponsor this industry, but in addition, it does not make economic sense to use tax payers' dollars to promote the chrysotile asbestos industry which appears to be dying in Quebec. Over 90% of the workers have been laid off; the remaining approximately 550 workers have had their wages slashed and work part-time; and in 2007, the asbestos mining company, LAB Chrysotile Inc, filed for bankruptcy protection.

The Economic Development Agency of Canada and the Department of Natural Resources have given the Chrysotile Institute (formerly called the Asbestos Institute) more than \$20 million

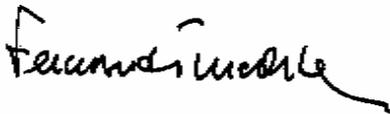
over the past 25 years. It is time to stop this wasteful use of public funds which is harming Canada's scientific and moral reputation around the world and exposes innocent people to harm from asbestos.

In February 2008, your government announced another grant of \$750,000 to the Chrysotile Institute for the next three years. These funds will, we presume, be contained in your government's January 27 budget.

Along with the Canadian Medical Association Journal, we call on you to demonstrate moral integrity and stop that funding. We suggest that instead funds be provided for sustainable economic development and transition assistance, such as funds for early retirement and retraining for workers in the dying asbestos mining industry.

We request a prompt reply as to how you propose to respond to this appeal.

Sincerely,



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On behalf of,

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Dr. John Last, Emeritus Professor of Epidemiology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ottawa

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Kathleen Ruff, Senior Advisor on Human Rights to the Rideau Institute on International Affairs

DOCUMENTARY NOTES

* The **Asbestos Institute** (re-named the Chrysotile Institute in 2004) was created in 1984. It is funded by the Canadian government, the Quebec government and the asbestos industry. The Canadian government names a third of its Board of Directors.

* The **claim that chrysotile asbestos disappears when it is mixed with cement** is put forward by Mr. John Bridle, who has no known scientific qualifications and has been a consultant for the Asbestos Cement Product Producers Association. He claims that when chrysotile asbestos is mixed with cement, it changes into a new harmless substance, which he names "Casitile". The Institute features Mr Bridle's theory on its website, in its newsletter and at its conferences.

(<http://www.chrysotile.com/data/Casitile,%20The%20New%20Asbestos%20Revised.pdf>
http://www.chrysotile.com/data/conferences/presentation_john_bridle.pdf;
http://www.chrysotile.com/data/newsletter/nl012_en.pdf)

"Regarding Mr. Bridle's `Casitile` theory, there is not one credible scientist or health organization that would give any support to this irresponsible and ludicrous position." says Larry Stoffman, a leading Canadian health expert. "It is clear that once the material breaks down, due to age, accident, explosion, or use, asbestos fibres become released and are a carcinogenic hazard to people who are thus exposed."

Mr Bridle convicted of making false claims. Mr. Bridle was convicted by a U.K. court under the Trades Description Act in February 2005 for falsely claiming on his business letterhead a basic minimum asbestos surveyor qualification he does not possess. See British Occupational Hygiene Society report "Asbestos surveyor found guilty of breaching Trade Descriptions Act".

<http://www.bohs.org/newsArticle.aspx?newsItem=14>

* **Chrysotile Institute Press Release claiming that Mr Bridle is "the foremost authority on asbestos sciences in the world"** <http://www.prnewswire.co.uk/cgi/news/release?id=175676>

* **The World Health Organization's position on asbestos-cement.** The WHO has called for chrysotile asbestos to be banned. It has expressed particular concern over asbestos cement, saying "Continued use of asbestos cement in the construction industry is a particular concern, because the workforce is large, it is difficult to control exposure, and in-place materials have the potential to deteriorate and pose a risk to those carrying out alterations, maintenance and demolition."

http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2006/WHO_SDE_OEH_06.03_eng.pdf

* **Misrepresentation of the WHO and ILO.** In an article in its December 2008 newsletter promoting asbestos-cement pipes, the Chrysotile Institute reports that the WHO and the ILO "have emphasized the contribution of this type of pipe (asbestos-cement) to economic development".

(http://www.chrysotile.com/data/newsletter/Chrysotile_Dec2008_EN.pdf)

The clear message given is that both the WHO and the ILO favour asbestos-cement pipes as making a positive contribution to economic development. This is a total misrepresentation. Both the WHO and the ILO have called for all forms of asbestos to be banned.

In another article in its December 2008 newsletter, the Chrysotile Institute states "Over the past few years, according to the conclusions drawn by a Group of Experts convened by the WHO, an acceptable chrysotile exposure level may vary between 1 and 2 fibres per cubic centimetre of air (f/cc)". Again, this is misleading information which implies that the WHO believes that chrysotile asbestos can be safely used. To the contrary, the position of the WHO is that chrysotile asbestos should be banned and that "No threshold has been identified for the carcinogenic risk of chrysotile."

Canadian Medical Association Journal asks the government to stop funding the Chrysotile Institute, *Asbestos Mortality: A Canadian Export*, <http://www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/full/179/9/871>