



**Canadian Association
of Physicians
for the Environment**

November 18, 2019

Monsieur François Legault
Premier Ministre du Québec

Dear Premier Legault:

We wish to commend your government for mandating le Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (the Office of Public Hearings on the Environment) to hold a public inquiry to examine the scientific evidence on asbestos, the 800 million tons of asbestos wastes left by the mining industry in Quebec and to determine whether these wastes safely can be commercialized. We especially welcome the fact that the government has stressed that the inquiry will give priority to science, health and the environment.

In recent demonstrations in Montreal, across Canada and around the world, thousands of young people voiced the following demand to governments: "Listen to the science."

We strongly support their demand and believe that the challenge to base government policy on independent science is one of the most important challenges of our times. Repeatedly we have witnessed how different industries, whether it be the fossil fuel industry or the tobacco, asbestos, pharmaceutical, pesticide or sweetened drinks industry, have put forward distorted information that serves their financial interests, but has caused great harm to human health, as well as environmental destruction. Ultimately, this false and misleading information and the misguided actions it triggers create huge economic costs that must be paid by the public. In Quebec and across Canada, for example, asbestos continues to be the leading cause of occupational deaths. While the asbestos industry walks away from their past actions and turns their back on the asbestos victims, Canadians are spending [billions of dollars](#) of public funds on health care costs and on removal of deteriorated asbestos from schools, hospitals, buildings and homes.

We are writing to you now to express our extreme concern that the credibility of Quebec is being used in a destructive and immoral manner to disseminate false "scientific" information that endangers human life.

The Quebec government requires that organisations registered in Quebec as [non-profit](#)

[organisations](#) "pursue a goal of a moral or altruistic nature and do not intend to make monetary gains to be shared among the members" (translation).

The [International Chrysotile Association](#) (ICA) is [registered in Quebec](#) as a non-profit organisation. However, far from serving "a moral or altruistic purpose", the ICA finances and disseminates dangerous misinformation that causes harm and loss of life. The [ICA promotes](#) the false claim that asbestos is an excellent product that can be safely used in developing countries - a product that Canada has banned as being a hazardous product that is not possible to use safely. On its [Facebook site](#), the ICA promotes the false information: "No case of cancer caused by chrysotile asbestos has been found."

The ICA publishes articles ([THE ANTI-ASBESTOS CRUSADE: A 21ST CENTURY TRADE WAR](#), October 15, 2019) falsely stating that chrysotile asbestos can be safely used because "it is completely excreted from the body in 15 days and cannot harm the human body." This claim, called the "biopersistence" theory, was invented by David Bernstein, a scientist who after working for the tobacco industry has worked closely with the ICA for decades and travels the world to help them sell asbestos in developing countries. Bernstein was paid \$1 million by the now defunct Asbestos Institute in Montreal to develop his biopersistence theory, which he claims shows that chrysotile asbestos can be safely used. Chrysotile asbestos represents 95% of all asbestos sold in the past century and represents 100% of the global asbestos trade today.

As Bernstein himself admits when questioned in court, not a single scientific organisation in the world supports either his biopersistence theory or his safe use of asbestos theory. These dangerous and unfounded propositions have been rejected by medical authorities in Quebec, Canada and the world, as well as by the governments of Quebec and Canada. As Quebec's Minister of Health has [stated](#) with regard to the BAPE inquiry into chrysotile asbestos mining wastes, "Asbestos is a proven carcinogen and there is no level of exposure that is judged safe for its effects on health" (translation). The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) have called for an end to the use of chrysotile asbestos and [state](#): "The firm conclusion of the WHO and IARC assessments is that chrysotile causes cancer of the lung, larynx and ovary, mesothelioma and asbestosis."

The ICA states that "More than 90% of chrysotile (asbestos) is used in the construction of buildings in fibre cement and in the making of construction materials. The chrysotile fibre is encapsulated in a matrix of cement or resin, preventing the release of fibres." The ICA claims that the millions of dollars worth of asbestos-cement roofing and pipes its member companies place in schools and homes in developing countries, pose no risk to the health of the population "since the cement matrix excludes the possibility of release of free asbestos fibers into the atmosphere." This again is deadly, false information that increases harm. Children in India, Indonesia, Vietnam and other developing countries where the ICA members sell their asbestos products are attending schools and living in homes with broken asbestos-cement

roofing just above their heads and broken pieces of asbestos-cement littered outside, releasing asbestos fibres into the air which they and their families breathe. Meanwhile environmental disasters, such as hurricanes and floods - now more common with climate change - destroy asbestos-cement roofing and infrastructure, releasing asbestos fibres into the air and increasing the threat to health of the population and rescue workers.

The assertion by the ICA that asbestos-cement roofing is safe is nonsense. Asbestos-cement roofing is illegal in Canada. As the WHO states in its publication [Chrysotile Asbestos](#): "The use of asbestos containing building materials in the poorest communities, bringing families into close proximity to sources of exposure to chrysotile fibres, is of particular concern."

The ICA serves the financial interests of the asbestos companies that finance it

The six directors and financiers of the ICA are not disinterested persons dedicated to altruism and moral purposes. They work for asbestos mining corporations in Russia (Yury Kozlov), Kazakhstan (Kanat Kopbayev) and Zimbabwe (Chirandu Dhlembeu), asbestos cement companies in India (Dr. G. Vivekanand) and Mexico (Antonio Galvan Carriles) and include a representative of a former asbestos lobby organisation in the United States (Bob J. Pigg). They have a financial interest in promoting the sale of asbestos to developing countries.

Usually the lobbying activities of the ICA are done secretly. However, documents revealed in court show how the ICA has [interfered](#) in the democratic process in developing countries to advance the financial interests of its members and defeat proposed bans on asbestos.

As well as lobbying against asbestos bans in developing countries, the ICA also lobbies at the United Nations to prevent any safety controls being placed on asbestos exported to developing countries and to [deny developing countries the right to Prior Informed Consent](#) before asbestos is exported to them. In its [material](#) submitted at the United Nations Rotterdam Convention conference in May 2019, the ICA states: "The ICA is an organization that defends the legitimate interests of its partners."

The ICA repeatedly states that recent scientific evidence supports the use of chrysotile asbestos. This false information helps their sales and profits. By contrast, scientific experts in Quebec, Canada and around the world clearly state that recent evidence confirms that chrysotile asbestos, like other forms of asbestos, causes lung and other cancers, mesothelioma and asbestosis and should not be used.

The ICA attacks those who oppose the use of asbestos - such as the Canadian government and the European Union, the Canadian and the Quebec Medical Associations, the Canadian and Quebec Cancer Societies, the Canadian and Quebec Public Health Associations, the World Health Organisation, the International Commission on Occupational Health, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, the Union for International Cancer Control, among many others - saying they are corrupt and working for secret commercial interests, are "anti-asbestos zealots", are "victims of anti-asbestos hysteria", are part of an "anti-chrysotile

crusade", are part of a secret trade war that is using "tricks" to discredit asbestos and manipulate the public.

The ICA [attacked](#) the decision by the Canadian government to ban asbestos as being "an excessive, radical, inequitable measure, which carries many risks."

A former director of the ICA, Nurlan Omarov, who worked for a Kazakhstan asbestos mine, commissioned the payment of more than a million dollars to hire a spy, Robert Moore, to infiltrate and spy for four years on the activities of persons in Canada and other countries working to ban asbestos. Moore was able, through his spying activities on a [Canadian human rights activist](#) (Kathleen Ruff), to fraudulently meet with the leader of a Quebec political party in the Quebec National Assembly and also to fraudulently attend the UN Rotterdam Convention's Conference of the Parties in Geneva. These acts constitute serious wrongdoing and an undermining of national and international democracy. The ICA refused to condemn these activities.

In the past, representatives of Quebec asbestos mines sat on the Board of Directors of the ICA. This is no longer the case. None of ICA's directors live in Quebec or Canada. They live in Russia, Kazakhstan, Zimbabwe, India, Mexico and the USA. A lawyer, Emiliano Alonso Pelegrin, is listed in the Quebec government's corporate registry as being the physical representative of the ICA. The address given for him is the address of the law company, Dentons, at 1, Place Ville Marie, bureau 3900 Montréal (Québec). Mr. Alonso, however, is located in Belgium, where he has a consulting company that carries out lobbying activities at the EU in Brussels and the UN in Geneva. He has lobbied at the UN in Geneva on behalf of the ICA to defeat safety controls on the asbestos trade. Dentons confirm that he is not a lawyer with their company. The phone number given for the ICA on its website is a phone number in Belgium.

The fact that the ICA has no representative in Quebec in its legal structure may not conform with the requirements of Quebec corporate law. This, however, is not the focus of our concern. Of far greater concern is the fact that the reputation of Quebec is being used to assist in distorting science for financial gains and inflicting harm on people in developing countries who do not deserve to be harmed.

We believe that it is wrong for the credibility of the Quebec government to be used to assist the ICA to:

- Promote the sale in developing countries of a product that is banned in Canada because it poses a threat to human health.
- Disseminate false "scientific" information that endangers human life and that is rejected by reputable scientific experts and scientific organisations in Quebec, in Canada and around the world.

- Defeat the right of developing countries to "prior informed consent" under a UN Convention (the Rotterdam Convention) which enables them to control or refuse shipment of asbestos to their countries.

We believe that this situation is unjust. The activities of the ICA serve their own financial interests by promoting use of asbestos in developing countries. The activities of the ICA constitute the opposite of "promoting moral and altruistic activities." Legitimizing ICA's activities, as the Quebec government presently does, indicates that the Quebec government condones the dissemination of dangerous scientific misinformation that harms human health. It indicates that Quebec is practicing a double standard in giving legal legitimacy to an organisation that promotes the use of asbestos to developing countries, an activity that is banned in Quebec itself.

We believe that this situation is scientifically and morally indefensible. It is a shameful violation of the requirement to be "dedicated to moral and altruistic purposes." The ICA is bringing dishonour on Quebec around the world.

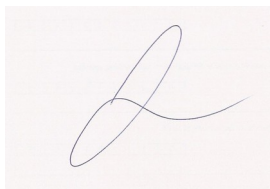
We are therefore calling on your government to investigate this situation, end the Quebec government's complicity with this indefensible asbestos industry malfeasance and take action to ensure that a similar situation involving another industry cannot re-occur.

We look forward to receiving your response and will be pleased to provide further supporting documentation, if required.

Respectfully,



Kathleen Ruff, recipient of the medal of the Quebec National Assembly



Jean Zigby, MD, CCFP(PC), Past President, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment - Association Canadienne des Médecins pour l'Environnement

ON BEHALF OF:

ORGANISATIONS

ANDEVA - Association nationale de défense des victimes de l'amiante et autres maladies professionnelles, France. Jacques Faugeron, President.

Asian Ban Asbestos Network (ABAN). Sugio Furuya, Coordinator.

India Ban Asbestos Network – India. Pooja Gupta, National Coordinator.

Union des travailleuses et travailleurs accidentés ou malades (UTTAM), Québec. Roch LaFrance, Secrétaire général.

Ban Asbestos Network Korea, Seoul, South Korea, Jung Jiyol, co-chair.

Asian Citizen's Center for Environment and Health, Seoul, South Korea, Paek Domyung, co-representative.

Consumers Association of Penang, Malaysia. Mohideen Abdul Kader, President.

Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization (ADAO), United States. Linda Reinstein, President/CEO.

Sahabat Alam Malaysia (Friends of the Earth Malaysia). Meenakshi Raman, President.

International Pollutants Elimination Network (IPEN). Dr. Tadessa Amara and Pamela Miller, Co-Chairs.

International Ban Asbestos Secretariat - IBAS. Laurie Kazan-Allen, Co-ordinator.

Ban Asbestos France – Association de lutte contre l'amiante, France. Annie Thébaud Mony, Présidente.

Comité Anti Amiante Jussieu, France. Marc Hindry, représentant.

Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto - ABREA. Eliezer Joao de Souza, President.

Building and Woodworkers International. Fiona Murie, Global Director, Construction and Occupational Health and Safety.

Fundación Colombia Libre de Asbesto, Colombia. Guillermo Villamizar, Director.

Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Anchorage, Alaska, USA. Pamela Miller, Executive Director.

Center For Analyses and Action on Toxics and Alternatives - CAATA (Mexico), Fernando Bejarano Director.

Prevent Cancer Now, Canada. Meg Sears, Chair.

Ban Asbestos Network of India (BANI), New Delhi. Gopal Krishna, LL.B., Ph.D, Director.

People's Health Movement - Canada. Dr. Smita Pakhalé, MD, FRCPC, MSc (Epi & Biostat), representative.

Center for Public Health and Environmental Development (CEPHED), Kathmandu, Nepal. Ram Charitra Sah, Executive Director and Environment Scientist.

European Federation of Building and Woodworkers - EFBWW. Sam Hägglund, General Secretary.

People's Health Movement – USA. Julia Robinson, representative.

Association Henri Pézerat – travail – santé - environnement, France. Annie Thébaud Mony.

European Society for Environmental und Occupational Medicine (EOM Society). Prof. Dr. med. Xaver Baur, President.

Terre et Développement, Yaoundé, Cameroon. Tlontcheu Kameni Maurice, Coordinator.

Center for Policy Analysis/CPATH, San Francisco, CA, USA. Ellen R. Shaffer, PhD, MPH, Co-Director.

Società Nazionale Operatori Prevenzione (SNOP) - Italy. President: dr. Anna Maria Di Giammarco.

UK Construction Safety Campaign. Bill Lawrence, secretary.

NGO Chemical Safety Agency, Ukraine, Olga Tsygulyova, expert.

INDIVIDUALS

NOTE: Institutions named for identification purposes only

Dr. Jukka Takala, DSc, MSc, BSc, FFOM (Hon), President, International Commission of Occupational Health. Adjunct Prof, Tampere Universities, Finland. Former posts: Executive Director emeritus, WSH-Institute, Ministry of Manpower, Singapore; Director, EU-OSHA, European Union; Director, ILO InFocus Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment.

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Norman King, M.Sc. Épidemiology. Public health professional and administrator in the Québec public health network in Québec City and Montréal for 35 years in the fields of occupational and environmental health. Currently retired. Still teaching occupational health and safety at UQAM's École des sciences de la gestion and scientific advisor to the Association des victimes de l'amiante du Québec.

Jacques Levasseur, MD, médecin retraité, Québec.

Fernanda Giannasi, Civil, Safety and Health Engineer. Retired Labour Inspector at the former Labour and Employment Ministry in São Paulo state (currently Ministry of Economy). Founder of ABREA. Coordinator of the Virtual-Citizen Network for the Ban of Asbestos in Latin America. Vice-President of ABRASTT - Brazilian Association of Workers' Health.

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Dr. Cathy Conrad, Professor, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies. Program Coordinator, Bachelor of Environmental Studies. Saint Mary's University, Halifax, NS, Canada.

Barry Castleman, ScD, Environmental Consultant, USA.

Dr. Evelyn Glensk, former member of the head of the German federal association of asbestos victims groups (Bundesverband der Asbestose Selbsthilfegruppen), Germany.

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Arturo Juarez Aguilar. Filmmaker. Aberración óptica, México City, Mexico.

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