

(Date to be added)

Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad
Minister of Labour & Employment, Sis Ram Ola
Minister of Forests & Environment, Jayanthi Natarajan
Government of India

Dear Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Minister of Labour & Employment and
Minister of Forests & Environment:

We respectfully wish to bring to your attention our deep concerns regarding efforts currently underway to promote the use of chrysotile asbestos in India.

On December 3 and 4, the International Chrysotile Association, which represents the interests of the global asbestos industry, together with the Asbestos Cement Product Manufacturers' Association of India, will be holding a conference in New Delhi to promote use of chrysotile asbestos in India and to put forward the claim that scientific research shows that chrysotile asbestos can be safely used.

This claim is utterly false. The world scientific community has overwhelmingly concluded that chrysotile asbestos causes deadly diseases, such as asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung and other cancers, and that it cannot be safely used.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer and the World Health Organization have called for an end to all use of chrysotile asbestos in order to prevent further tragic epidemics of asbestos-related diseases.

To name just a few leading organisations, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, the International Commission on Occupational Health, the International Social Security Association, the International Union for Cancer Control, representing 770 member organisations in 155 countries, including the Indian Cancer Society and the Cancer Aid and Research Foundation of India, the International Trade Union Confederation, representing 175 million workers in 151 countries, the Collegium Ramazzini, the Joint Policy Committee of Societies of Epidemiology and the Indian Association of Occupational Health have all called for an end to the use of chrysotile asbestos.

Chrysotile asbestos represents 95% of all asbestos used over the past century and today represents the entirety of the asbestos trade. In every country in which it has been used, chrysotile asbestos has left behind a legacy of terrible human suffering and billions of dollars of economic costs for health care and compensation for victims and for removal of deteriorated asbestos from buildings. For this reason, the World Bank recommends against the use of chrysotile asbestos.

The International Chrysotile Association is a lobby organisation, based in Quebec, Canada and headed by Mr. Jean Leblond, a long-time salesman for the Quebec asbestos mines. The Association has been condemned by medical experts in Quebec and around the world for putting forward deadly, deceptive misinformation that will cause suffering and loss of life for years to come.

Not a single reputable scientific agency in the world supports the claim put forward by the International Chrysotile Association and the Asbestos Cement Product Manufacturers' Association that chrysotile asbestos can be safely used.

In face of the demand by Quebec and other health experts to end its export of asbestos, the Quebec government last year closed down the last asbestos mines in Quebec. Quebec and the rest of Canada virtually stopped using asbestos many years ago. However, because of the long latency period for asbestos-related diseases, 70% of deaths from occupational disease in Quebec continue today to be caused by asbestos.

In the face of the public health disaster caused by asbestos, 54 industrialized countries have banned any use of asbestos. Other countries, such as the United States and Canada simply stopped using it. Consequently, the asbestos industry, in order to ensure its continued profits, is aggressively targeting Asia countries for sales. Just six Asian countries – China, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and Sri Lanka – now represent 70% of world asbestos consumption.

While the asbestos industry pretends that asbestos is widely used, in fact, just eight countries represent 87% of global consumption: China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Russia, Vietnam, Thailand and Sri Lanka.

India imports more asbestos than any other country on the planet, with imports having risen from 253,382 tons in 2006 to 473,240 tons in 2012, an increase of 186%. These vast amounts of asbestos, being placed in homes and schools across India, are a deadly time bomb that will go on causing suffering and deaths for decades to come, as well as causing a financial drain on India.

While Russia and Brazil reap the profits of exporting asbestos, it is India that will pay the price in human suffering and in financial costs.

While there is no systematic monitoring and reporting of asbestos related diseases (ARD) in India, 225 cases of mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer found in people exposed to all forms of asbestos fibres, have been reported by the Indian cancer registry, the Gujarat Cancer Institute and the Tata Cancer Institute. Independent studies in Mumbai, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand of former asbestos product manufacturing factory/mine workers have identified over 500 cases of asbestosis, some of whom have also been compensated for contracting ARD due to work related exposure. New data being collected by independent health organisations show diseases amongst family members of workers due to secondary and environmental exposures. Several legal cases are pending in labour and civil courts in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

As a result of increased use of asbestos in Asia, Dr. G.V. Le, Dr. K. Takahashi et al have warned: “A surge of ARD in Asia should be anticipated in the coming decades. Asian countries should not only cease asbestos use but also prepare themselves for an impending epidemic of ARD.”¹

In order to promote its false claim that chrysotile asbestos can be safely used, the International Chrysotile Association financed a paper to be written by Dr. David Bernstein, who has worked for decades for the tobacco and the industry industry. Dr. Bernstein will present his paper, *Health Risks of Chrysotile Revisited*, supporting use of chrysotile asbestos, at the New Delhi conference. A New York court has recently ruled that a number of scientific papers written by Dr. Bernstein, financed by an asbestos products company, were intended to cast doubt on the capability of chrysotile asbestos to cause cancer, and constituted potential crime-fraud.

When he testified in court on behalf of an asbestos company, Dr. Bernstein admitted to the judge that not a single scientific body anywhere agreed with his views on chrysotile asbestos.

The asbestos industry is concerned to protect its profits. Our concern is the protection of public health. We respectfully urge you, as Minister of Health, Minister of Labour and Minister of Environment for India, to put the health interests of the people of India ahead of the vested interests of the asbestos industry.

We urge you and the government of India to support the recommendation of the World Health Organization and the worldwide, reputable scientific community and ban the use of any asbestos in India in order to prevent further unnecessary suffering and death. We urge you to join the vast majority of countries in the world who have adopted an enlightened policy, based on the overwhelming scientific evidence, to ban all use of asbestos in order to protect public health for generations to come.

We would be happy to provide our support to you in any way that might be useful. Please do not hesitate to call upon us.

Respectfully,

Notes: Titles and affiliations are given for identification purposes only.
Some of the signers have been involved in asbestos litigation.

¹ Le, G.V., Takahashi, K. et al, Asbestos use and asbestos-related diseases in Asia: Past, present and future, *Respirology* (2011) 16, 767–775.