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Press Release...No Embargo Time

May 14 , 2010

## **Canadian Minister's Asbestos Lie!**

Asbestos is the biggest single cause of occupational death in the UK. Of the six million tonnes of asbestos imported into the country, a huge amount came from Canadian mines.<sup>1</sup> The federal government in Ottawa and the provincial government in Quebec have aided and abetted the Canadian asbestos industry to create a global climate in which the sale of this natural resource – an acknowledged carcinogen – can continue.

The time has finally come for these governments to be held to account for the deaths they have caused. Just as a drug pusher is responsible for the fatal overdose of a heroin addict, so the Canadian and Quebec Governments, are responsible for thousands of asbestos deaths in the UK and around the world.

With this in mind, in January 2010, the Merseyside and Asbestos Victims Support Group (MAVSG) wrote to the Canadian Minister for Health – Ms. Leona Aglukkaq. We pointed out that she was “the only Health Minister in the western world supporting continued use of asbestos.”

In reply to our letter, we received a communication on May 7, 2010 from Lawrence Cannon, the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs. He stated: “**At the international level, Canada does not initiate promotional activities related to the export of chrysotile.**”

**We know this to be a lie.** Canadian embassies in foreign countries, such as the one in Jakarta, Indonesia, are used for receptions for pro-asbestos lobbyists. There are documented links between Canadian civil servants and the Chrysotile Institute, the national mouthpiece for the asbestos industry, which show the collaborative efforts used to promote asbestos sales abroad and to influence international organizations. Indeed, documents unearthed by the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat through an access to information application show direct email links between Canadian asbestos industry stakeholders, the Chrysotile Institute, Canadian civil servants and Canadian embassy staff. This correspondence details attempts to manipulate the Mexican Government's asbestos policy.

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<sup>1</sup> According to data supplied by the United States Geological Services UK asbestos imports in 1960, 1970, 1975 and 1980 were respectively 170,893 tonnes (t), 154,636 t, 139,185 t, 94640 t.

Commenting on the correspondence received from Minister Cannon, John Flanagan of the MAVSG says:

“Cannon’s reply was disingenuous. He asserted his government’s ‘controlled use approach for chrysotile.’ From all we have seen in the UK and elsewhere, when it comes to asbestos, there is no such thing as ‘controlled use.’ The failure of this policy has been widely documented; in the UK, thousands of people are dying every year from their ‘controlled exposures’ to asbestos.

Canada – one of the world’s largest suppliers of asbestos – has committed a humanitarian crime of enormous proportions in aiding and abetting the asbestos industry. That it continues to support this industry of mass destruction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is testament to the fact that the Government of Canada has been corrupted by vested interests which prioritize their financial and political gain over the human right to life. The lie told by Minister Canon is yet another example of Canada’s disregard for human life and lack of respect for those it has killed.”

#### **Notes to Editors**

- For further information, contact: John Flanagan of the Merseyside Asbestos Victims Support Group (MAVSG): tel: 0151 236 1895; email: gfr15@dial.pipex.com
- Since the MAVSG was founded in 1992, it has helped thousands of victims of asbestos whose exposures took place in the Liverpool docks, in construction and in heavy industry. We have also seen many people who were exposed to asbestos dust brought home of the work clothes of family members as well as people who were exposed to asbestos environmental.
- The efforts of the MAVSG were pivotal in the formation of the All Party Parliamentary Asbestos Sub-Group and the Asbestos Victims Support Group Forum UK.