

MEDIA RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 13, 2008

### **CANADA OBSTRUCTING U.N. CONVENTION OVER ASBESTOS**

A U.N. Convention (the Rotterdam Convention) that protects developing countries from severely hazardous chemicals and pesticides is on its death bed due to obstruction by Canada.

Canada has obstructed the Convention by refusing to allow chrysotile asbestos to be listed as a hazardous substance, even though the Convention's expert scientific body has repeatedly called for its listing, pointing out that it meets every scientific and legal criterion in the Convention.

Listing would mean that asbestos exporting countries, such as Canada, would have to obtain prior informed consent before they could export asbestos to developing countries.

"Canada is putting the integrity of the Rotterdam Convention in jeopardy in order to protect its failing asbestos industry," said Dr. Kapil Khatter, President of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. "We in Canada have this right. Why is our government denying this right to people in developing countries? Are their lives not equally valuable?"

Canada has been the lead country to block the listing of asbestos by denying consensus with the support of Kyrgyzstan, Iran, India, Ukraine and Peru. 99% of asbestos exported around the world today is chrysotile asbestos.

"Canada's obstruction has made the Convention unworkable," said Kathleen Ruff, former director of the B.C. Human Rights Commission. "It has forced U.N. officials to circulate proposals to re-write the Convention with a complex system of dual standards and exemptions, which would be a disaster. It would gut the Convention and put commercial interests ahead of human health. This is not what Canadians want."

The expert committee's recommendation to list chrysotile asbestos will be put forward one more time at a crucial Conference in Rome October 27-31. U.N. officials and many others fear that Canada will once more refuse to allow asbestos to be listed, causing a crisis for the survival of the Convention.

"This is a tragedy for public health, a victory for the asbestos lobby and an ignoble reflection on Canada," said Geoffrey Tweedale, joint author of *Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and Its Fight for Survival*.

"95% of Canada's asbestos is exported to developing countries, where it is handled by workers with few protections," said Barry Castleman, an internationally respected occupational health expert. "Canada is immorally creating a public health catastrophe in these countries"

"We call on the Canadian government to stop blocking the Convention and allow chrysotile asbestos to be listed," said Fe de Leon, Researcher of the Canadian Environmental Law Association.

- 30 -

Contact:

Kathleen Ruff, 250-847-1848, kruff@bulkley.net  
Dr Kapil Khatter, 613-864-9591, kapil1@sympatico.ca  
Barry Castleman, 301-933-9097, barry.castleman@gmail.com