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Prime Minister Stephen Harper  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

On June 20, 2011, the 143 countries that have ratified the U.N. Rotterdam Convention will meet in Geneva.

At that meeting, the delegates will decide whether to approve the recommendation of the Convention's expert scientific body to put chrysotile asbestos (the only form of asbestos traded in the world today) on the Convention's list of hazardous substances.

For more than seven years, Canada, along with a handful of other countries, has blocked this recommendation, thus putting protection of the interests of the asbestos industry ahead of protection of global health.

We ask that at the June Conference of the Parties, Canada, for the first time, support the listing of chrysotile asbestos.

The purpose of the Rotterdam Convention is to bring about responsible trade of hazardous substances by requiring that exporting countries obtain "prior informed consent" before shipping substances, which are on the Convention's list, to another country.

The Convention's mission is environmental justice. In particular, it empowers developing countries by providing them with a basic human right – the right to information and the right to refuse hazardous substances that a country does not have the means to safely manage. This critical information thus enables developing countries to more effectively protect their citizens from harm.

We ask you to support the listing of chrysotile asbestos for the following reasons:

- 1) Chrysotile asbestos is listed as a hazardous substance under Canadian law. It is, in our view, hypocritical and immoral to apply a double standard of inferior protection for people in developing countries.
- 2) The Convention's expert body (the Chemical Review Committee), composed of 31 scientists from around the world including Canada, has repeatedly recommended, after careful consideration, that chrysotile asbestos should be put on the Convention's list of hazardous substances. By blocking the recommendation of the scientific experts, Canada is jeopardizing the very purpose of the Convention, which is to put scientific evidence ahead of political interests.

3) By putting the interests of the asbestos industry ahead of the protection of health and the environment, Canada is, in our view, acting as a destructive global citizen and bringing shame on Canada's reputation.

We would appreciate your immediate response on this critical matter relating to international co-operation to protect global health.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Ruff, Senior Human  
Rights Adviser, Rideau Institute

Dr Jean Zigby, President, Canadian Association  
of Physicians for the Environment

Copies to:

Jack Layton, Leader of the Official Opposition

Bob Rae, Interim Leader, Liberal Party of Canada

Vivian Barbot, Interim President, Bloc Québécois

Elizabeth May, Leader, Green Party of Canada