

Friday, 13 May 2011

The Honorable Prime Minister Morgan Richard Tsvangirai
Embassy of Zimbabwe
1608 New Hampshire Avenue
Washington, DC 20009
Fax: 202-483-9326

Dear Mr. Prime Minister Tsvangirai:

We, as doctors, engineers, scientists, labour leaders, public health organizations, and organizations representing asbestos victims, are extremely concerned to learn that the government of Zimbabwe is considering financing and reopening the old Shabanie and Mashaba asbestos mines. Asbestos, a known human carcinogen, kills more than 107,000 humans every year.

The World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization, and the International Trade Union Confederation – representing 176 million workers in 151 countries – have all called for an end to the use of any form of asbestos and more than 55 countries have banned asbestos.

Your government's announcement echoes recent attempts to reopen the Jeffery asbestos mine in Canada. The only support for this reprehensible and retrogressive action is from those who work for and with the asbestos industry. National and international medical and health authorities and concerned citizens around the world have long stood up in opposition to this mine project, and groups such as ours pledge a relentless commitment to a global ban of asbestos.

The time is now – as you rebuild Zimbabwe - to embrace a policy that protects public health. The Zimbabwean government has the opportunity, the moral responsibility and the duty to end the deadly asbestos legacy. We understand that asbestos is a sensitive political and economic issue and that your government might be tempted by expected profits. But the short and long term effects of pursuing this strategy are simply not worth the cost to humanity, as people will be exposed to this deadly carcinogen and will die as a result.

Global borders are indistinguishable and the world is watching you make history through your local and international decisions. For the sake of humanity, we urge you not to reopen the Shabanie and Mashaba asbestos mines and, instead, to prevent the painful disabilities and deaths of thousands of innocent people around the world.

Sincerely,

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