



Il Ministro della Salute

Ministero della Salute

DGREI

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The Director-General of IARC

Dr. Christopher P. Wild

Lyon

c.c. The Director-General of WHO

Dr Margaret Chan

Geneva

Dear Director-General,

the Italian Ministry of Health is extremely concerned about the public health issues stemming from the production, use and disposal of products containing asbestos.

The many pathologies linked to these fibres, some of which are disabling or lethal, are extremely burdensome on the whole community, and not only on the patients and their families (in Italy alone there are about one thousand deaths every year from asbestos-related illnesses).

Our country, which banned the use of any materials containing asbestos as long ago as 1992 is therefore committed to a complex and very demanding process which entails the thorough elimination of all the asbestos which, if not completely captured in undamaged artefacts, can propagate the fibres into the environment.

In this connection, the commitment of the government of which I am honoured to be a member, took the form, among other things, of a governmental conference held on 22-24 November this year which came up with suggestions for actions in various areas, which will be channelled into a National Plan which is currently being drafted.

Unfortunately, we all know very well that there are some countries where asbestos production is continuing, sometimes based on subtle distinctions referring to an alleged lesser danger from certain forms of asbestos such as chrysotile, based upon information which has not yet been sufficiently proven scientifically.

It appears that this information is being supported and disseminated above all by lobbies connected with the asbestos industry.

In this connection I have to tell you how disappointed I have been to hear that your Agency sees nothing wrong with taking part in the events organised by these industrial sectors in countries which are keen to continue trading in products containing asbestos, albeit perhaps in third countries.

Even though we know that your Agency claims that participation does not mean any endorsement of these positions but is exclusively intended to provide accurate information at these events regarding the subject matter, I believe that drawing on our experience with the tobacco industry, your Agency and its employees should refrain entirely from attending any of these events, and should rather denounce their conclusions through the numerous channels of communication which IARC and WHO have at their disposal in general, and I am therefore asking you to take action in this regard.

I am also asking that the experts working with IARC should be told that they must not attend any studies, conferences or any other activities in cooperation with industrial sectors which have compromised themselves with the production and trade in products containing asbestos in any form whatsoever.

I trust that you will respond favourably to this request which, through me, is being made by Italy, and I am looking forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Your sincerely

Renato Balduzzi
Minister of Health

