

Name:

Street: No.....

Cite EDC:

6 July, 2018

To: Prime Minister.

Dear Sir,

We write to you as Prime Minister, after the apparent collapse of the National Committee on Asbestos which had an array of Ministers on it. It was set up after the then Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Housing issued a communiqué announcing a “grand projet d’envergure” and stating clearly: “L’amiante étant un matériau toxique, le Ministre du Logement a plaidé [with the then Minister of Finance] pour un plan de désamiantage. Le Ministre des Finances a agréé a cette demande et il déboursa le budget nécessaire pour enlever de l’amiante dans ces maisons EDC/Ex-CHA.” (Official Communiqué 22 July 2015 – Annex I). The present Housing Minister has re-iterated an offer of “assistance” in a letter to our joint-committees (1 June 2018 – Annex II).

I, and the members of my family, listed below, are still residing in a house with asbestos external walls and partitions.

1. We write to you today to call on Government to begin work on *urgent and necessary assistance* in eliminating asbestos housing and rebuilding.
2. In particular we call for you to publish “regional contact details” for Sub-Units in charge of this work in each region, so that my family can register with it for *urgent and necessary assistance*.
3. We call for the National Committee on Asbestos to proceed with the phase-by-phase removal of asbestos and elimination of the waste, having assured the appropriate (i) training and (ii) equipping of a team of workers, organized to cover the 59 Cité EDC concerned, and for the reconstruction of a house for each family.
4. We call on you to publish a “time-frame” for the demolition-reconstruction work.

My family living in the unit includes:

Name	Relationship	Age
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Yours sincerely,

Brief History

As Government is aware, inhaling asbestos dust causes illness. It represents a risk to people living or working near the asbestos, and to untrained and poorly equipped people who might remove the asbestos, and to everyone nearby. Amongst the illnesses caused by exposure are mesothelioma, asbestosis, lung cancer, laryngeal cancer, ovarian cancer, testes cancer, pleural plaques, pleural thickening and pleural effusion. Deaths due to asbestos include those of Mr Gilbert Leong Son, who worked in a sugar estate office with asbestos walls and a unionized worker who handled asbestos piping, Mr Claude Marguerite.

The EDC houses made with asbestos were built in the 1960s when the dangers of asbestos were not widely known. By 1970, the dangers were acknowledged by States, which by then accepted responsibility for asbestos as a *known public health issue*.

It was over a decade later, starting in the 1980s, that the State began selling asbestos houses to occupants.

As Government is aware,

1) 12 years ago, Dr. R. Sibartie, then Head of the Health Ministry's Occupational Health Unit, concluded his Report on Asbestos as follows: *"The asbestos panels in the Housing Estates will have to be replaced by Government. This will be a very costly project, but the health of the inhabitants should be a major concern for the Government."* (10 May, 2006 – Annex III)

2) 5 years later the *Truth and Justice Commission Report* stated: *"Many housing estates have buildings constructed with asbestos, a toxic substance which is damaging to health. These houses should be pulled down on a phase to phase basis and other units constructed with proper material."* (Nov. 2011 -- Annex IV.) The Labour Government announced it would destroy and rebuild asbestos housing for all affected.

3) Another four years later, there was the Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Housing's communiqué referred to overleaf which led directly to the setting up of a National Committee on Asbestos with 6 Ministers sitting on it. A time-frame was promised at a meeting of 30 July, 2015 (See Annex V). And demolition actually began. It started with houses that were unoccupied. However, the Committee seems to have broken down.

Problems were apparently encountered: (i) SMF officers doing the demolition refused to continue work, fearing that they had neither the requisite training nor the equipment necessary to ensure their safety. (ii) There were problems about disposal, initially planned for La Chaumière but as this was not safe, the asbestos was sent to Mare Chicose. However, the landfill is not big enough to take the asbestos from all the Cité. Other solutions, including implosion and sealing into concrete blocks that could later be used for artificial reefs at sea, were, we believe, studied. (iii) Many houses in Mauritius, including EDC houses, no longer have clearly defined *owners* once the original "buyer" has died and they are then occupied by some of the person's heirs, or heirs of heirs. The first two issues need to be addressed by the State in a general manner, and the third will have to be addressed on a case-by-case basis with "public health" as the ultimate issue at stake.