

Brussels, 29 march 2017

Communiqué from various national associations for the defense of asbestos victims

A GREAT VICTORY FOR THE VICTIMS OF ASBESTOS

After 17 years of legal proceedings, the Brussels Court of Appeal ruled that Eternit-Belgium was guilty of and liable for Françoise Vannoorbeeck-Jonckheere's death due to mesothelioma (asbestos cancer of the pleura).

Deceased in July 2000, this resident of Kapelle-op-den-Bos, Belgium, was exposed for years to asbestos used by this multinational. Not only did hazardous exposures affect many workers, it also contaminated the environment and affected the health of local residents. Three other members of the Jonckheere family have also died from mesothelioma.

It is a historic decision for Belgium and significant for the rest of Europe and the world. It breaks the wall of silence in which many families are still confined. It is the culmination of a courageous struggle, like David against Goliath. Françoise refused a financial offer from Eternit that would have condemned her to silence.

The Court's judgment is based on substantial historical and scientific evidence. Eternit knew for decades that the asbestos it used could endanger workers and local residents. Furthermore, the judgment rejected Eternit's statute of limitation defense. The exposure of the victim was continuous from the 1950s to the 1990s, with the most recent years of exposure also having played a part in her illness.

In spite of the very low amount of compensation awarded to the victim (reduced for reasons of legal procedure), the most important objective of Françoise has been achieved: the recognition of the Eternit's liability for her illness and the rejection of the statute of

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limitations. The ruling is a landmark and may even be used in other jurisdictions, other circumstances and even in other countries by asbestos victims.

International associations of victims from Japan, France, Spain, Italy, Swiss and Britian which were , present in Brussels to receive the news of this verdict , expressed their solidarity with the legal fight for asbestos justice in Belgium and welcomed the Court of Appeal ruling which cited legal decisions and expert evidence from other countries. This, the first ruling against Eternit to be handed down by a Belgian court and the first victory for an environmental asbestos victim in Belgium, will inspire campaigners in other countries to hold asbestos multinationals to account for the harm they have done to human beings and the environment not only in Europe but also in Asia and Latin America.

Encouraged by this judicial victory, these national associations remain determined to continue their efforts to achieve:

- comprehensive compensation for all past, present and future asbestos victims.
- the eradication of sources of exposure to asbestos still present in the environment,
- substantial and widespread funding for medical research into new protocols to treat and eventually cure asbestos diseases.
- a worldwide ban of asbestos.

Japan Victims group
CAOVA, Suisse
IBAS, UK
AFEVA, Italie
ANDEVA, France
Absestos Victims support group, UK
Asociación de víctimas y afectados por el amianto en
Cataluña,
Abeva, Belgium

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Association Belge des Victimes de l'Amiante
Asbest in België: Vereniging van Asbestslachtoffers

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