

Thursday 25th April 2002

Minister Alec Erwin
Ministry of Trade and Industry
Parliament
Cape Town
8000
Fax: 021- 465 1291
By fax and post.

Dear Honourable Minister Erwin

South Africa's involvement in the international hazardous waste trade and South Africa's reluctance to sign international waste ban

We refer you to the attached letter which we have sent today to Minister Valli Moosa, as well as to previous correspondence with you on the matter of the hazardous waste trade, namely letters which were sent to you on the 28th September 2000 and 30th March 2001. These letters were sent to you on behalf of several national and international organisations acting in the public interest and guided by concerns for human health and the environment. We still have not received a response from yourself or your department in connection with these letters.

It has come to our attention on a couple of occasions that there are people within the Department of Trade and Industry who believe that the import of hazardous waste into South Africa may hold economic opportunities.

We reiterate that the potential risks that hazardous wastes pose to human health and the environment far outweigh any potential financial gain to select investors. We also reiterate that it is the already poor and vulnerable communities in South Africa who will pay the highest costs (in terms of negative impacts on human health and well being) for such hazardous schemes.

Whilst we recognise the need for South Africa to provide assistance to neighbouring states who do not have the resources nor expertise to deal with their hazardous wastes, we could never support the importation of hazardous wastes from more developed countries for any reason what so ever. This is the position of the Basel Convention.

We urge you to recognise the question of whether South Africa could benefit economically from the hazardous waste trade as being a national policy issue which should be agreed upon at a parliamentary level. Accordingly we have called on Minister Moosa to raise this issue with the Cabinet and with other honourable members of Parliament.

We request that you respond in writing to this letter and give us your assurance that you will take heed of your Constitutional responsibility to protect South Africans from the very harmful impacts of other people's hazardous waste.

Sincerely yours,

Bobby Peek

cc: Honourable Members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on
Environmental Affairs

Jim Puckett, Basel Action Network (BAN)

Earthlife Africa

Wildlife and Environment Society of SA

Jim Phelps Zululand Environmental Alliance

Mr Buti Mathebula, Director of Chemicals and Hazardous Waste

Patrick Pringle, Legal Resources Centre