

## **Rachna Dhingra's talk on "Continuing tragedy of Bhopal tragedy victims"**

**July 3, 2003, Redbud room, IMU, 5-7PM**

Rachna is working in Bhopal as a volunteer and will be there for the next 2 1/2 years.

### **Video documentary:**

Rachna started her talk by playing a documentary video on Bhopal Gas tragedy. The video gave a description of what happened and how. It also had interviews of local residents and volunteers working in the affected area. A few government official's responses were also recorded. Some the statistics based on the video are given below. For more detailed and accurate information please read the document on Bhopal Gas tragedy in [www.indiana.edu/~aid](http://www.indiana.edu/~aid).

- 20,000 people have died till now
- 15 to 20 people die every month even now
- Union carbide walked off the place without containing poison
- Contamination still exists
- Dow is now responsible for the toxic liabilities of union carbide.
- Dow and Union carbide have refused to provide information about the chemicals released to medical practitioners.
- Water samples collected showed chemicals that would cause damage to kidneys and human fetuses
- Almost 150000 people are continuing to suffer even now.

Union Carbide was approached legally to provide compensation of \$3 billion. They settled out of court for \$470 million.

The compensation was set to nearly \$500 for loss of life and \$330 for injury.

The Indian government has not released all funds that were given by Union Carbide as compensation. Their reply is a promise to use the amount for containing contamination. High mercury/lead in breast milk is one of the consequences of high amount of chemical ingredients in water.

### **How is Dow involved?**

Dow bought Union Carbide with its toxic liabilities.

The lease agreement for the land in Bhopal states that the leased land is given back as it was procured. But now it is polluted and it the responsibility of Dow to contain the contamination.

If the Indian Government takes responsibility of cleaning Bhopal, taxpayers will be forced to take the burden of Dow, which is unfair.

Trial against Anderson, union carbide and 9 Indian officials is going on still.

Anderson has never come to Bhopal to face trials.

Government of India has sent extradition papers for Anderson to USA

Charges against Anderson were reinstated after a few supporters went on a hunger strike for 23 days.

### **Some reasons why the leak was inevitable:**

Interview with local residents and visiting the place showed that even if the disaster was averted, contamination could not have been contained due to dumping of chemicals. The refrigeration was not working due to cost cutting measures. It was switched off to save \$50 a day.

People who were working in Bhopal factory at the time of the incident were not investigated properly and they got only 15-day trial compared to 6 months for the West Virginia branch.

Amount of gas in the tank was 4 times over the limit.

Unproven untested technologies were used in Bhopal to save 8 million dollars.

### **Status of cross section lawsuit.**

When the disaster happened, carbide blamed a disgruntled worker whose name is not released yet.

Some of the problems faced by the present day people in Bhopal are breathlessness, neurological problems and difficulty to do hard labor.

### **Demands from people to the Indian government.**

Indian government has not paid the compensation of 270 million.

Union Carbide is asking Indian government to use this to clean up.

24 studies have been conducted but never released.

### **Discussion:**

Q: Where was the factory located w.r.t. to the city? Why not sue the board of directors? Why go after Warren Anderson? Was it an Indian subsidiary?

A: The factory was 51% owned by UC

Q: what would be the cost of cleanup?

A: ~ \$350 million more

Q: Who settled with UC for \$470 million and not \$3 billion?

A: Indian Government

Q: what is happening with the money that is with the Indian Govt.?

Will the interest also be released?

A: The request is to release the funds with interest.

Q: Do the survivors know that they will get this compensation? Do they still have hope?

A: People in Bhopal are amazing and they still have hope to get their compensation, even after 19 years.

Q: Are there any Public Interest Litigations filed in India?

A: Not sure

Q: What is the current source of income for the people?

A: Women are involved in beedi rolling, pushing vegetable. Carts. Government started a women organization to provide rehabilitation measure for 100 women. The program is almost going to be closed now. Many women are fighting to get pension from state govt. Currently, a few NGOs are trying to set up a handmade paper factory with 20 women and expected to go upto 200. Satyu runs a clinic in Bhopal free of cost to Bhopal gas tragedy victims.

Q: What are the activities of ICJIB (International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal)?

A: It is a coalition of many groups. Campaign has been very active for the past two years after the merger. They are involved in many protests called actions against Dow chemicals and Indian government in a regular basis. One action got the factory sealed. Another action took 500 women and overtook the office in Chembur, Bombay. These actions build solidarity among the survivors. Leverage from trade unions for the severely affected community.

Q: Will the contamination money be released to the government?

A: No. Request is to set up a trust.

Q: did politicians include Bhopal in the electoral campaign?

A: Yes for many years. There were a few good gas ministers. In terms of legal aspect, government has been very helpful. In socio economic and health aspect, government of India has not done anything at all.

Q: How much money has been spent on campaigning throughout?

A: ICJIB would have spent around 15,000\$ last year.

A: How can we help?

After 19 years, Bhopal is still an issue and will be an issue if we don't come to terms. Activities of justice in Bhopal: Use proxies to talk during annual shareholders meeting and make Dow accept the liabilities. Passed a resolution in that of divest from Dow. Indian government is afraid to show itself as a place for bad investment and hence has not taken any measures against other Dow factories in India. Dow has an ethics line. AID members pick a day and call Dow. Calling in and writing letters really work. Make Dow shareholders aware of Dow's liability in Bhopal. Visit [www.bhopal.net](http://www.bhopal.net) for more information. You can sign up for hunger strikes for however long you want to help Bhopal campaign.

Q: Did Dow supply chemical weapons to Saddam Hussain?

A: May be. We are researching about it.

Q: What is AID Ann Arbor doing in Bhopal?

A: AID AA got in participating in a protest against DOW. Reenactment of the disaster night in common place. Run for your life - dash for safety race and give death certificates

for losers and give survivors info about contamination problems while living. Give a foul smelling water in name of Bhopal water and make people who drink sign an agreement 'no liability if results in injury or death'. Aid Austin, AID college park, and AID bay area is also participating in the campaign for Bhopal.

Q: How can AID Bloomington help?

A: AID Bloomington can help by funding a handmade paper factory along with many chapters. Participate in calls put up in bhopal.net - do research on Dow as and when called for. Help in education in Bhopal. Fund poetry and drawing competitions for the children in Bhopal. 100,000 people in Mumbai have joined hands to go to Bhopal to support the cause from January 16 to 21st 2004 and protest in front of Dow headquarters. Asean social forum met recently to discuss wsf. December 3rd is the 19th anniversary of Bhopal. It is also the global day of action for Bhopal.