

AI Index: ASA 20/014/2008

26 June 2008

Delhi: The Indian Government fails once again to offer any assurance that definitive and decisive action will be taken to address the long standing concerns of the people of Bhopal.

Amnesty International is concerned that once again the Indian government has failed to provide adequate assurances of protection and redress to the people of Bhopal condemning them to further health risks and social deprivation. This follows the release of a recent statement authorised by the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, to the people of Bhopal, which fell well short to meet their expectations. Amnesty International now urges the Prime Minister, to meet a delegation from Bhopal, now in Delhi, as a matter of urgency in order to agree on actions to be taken to address the long-standing concerns of the victims of the 1984 disaster.

Even though, the Prime Minister agreed 'in principle' to the Bhopal activists' requests, the statement did not offer any assurances and details to suggest that decisive actions to address the long-standing concerns of the people of Bhopal would be taken by the Government. The failure to provide adequate quantities of clean water continues, twenty four years after the gas leak, placing thousands of lives at risk.

In particular, the Prime Minister's statement did not offer any specificity regarding the request for a specially empowered Commission on Bhopal that survivors envisage will oversee all urgent rehabilitation issues. Bhopali activists declare that only a parliamentary bill can provide the necessary legal powers to enable such a commission to fulfil its remit. Without it, they claim, provision of clean water, adequate health care and research as well as social and economic provisions will not be met. In addition, the Prime Minister's statement made no mention of the several pending legal issues in which the government has failed to fulfil its duties to protect the affected people of Bhopal and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Amnesty International is also extremely concerned for the safety of the nine people from Bhopal who initiated an indefinite hunger strike, in Delhi, on the 10 of June, to express the desperation of their situation.

Two of the hunger strikers – Rachna Dhingra (30), and Meera More (27) –were among 36 that were arrested on 9 June for peacefully protesting in front of the Prime Minister's Office. The police also strip-searched, whipped and slapped youths and children from Bhopal (as young as six and eleven) while in police custody. A 19 year old was whipped with a belt and injured in the eye and had to be taken to the hospital. Even though the children were released shortly after the arrest, 25 persons were detained for ten days. To date the government has failed to launch an investigation into the allegations of excessive use of force used by police during these arrests.

Amnesty International has previously received reports of excessive and unnecessary use of force by police in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh on 17 May 2005 against some 300 protestors which included women and children.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

More than 7,000 people died within a matter of days when toxic gases leaked from a chemical plant in Bhopal, India in December 1984. Since then, exposure to the toxins has resulted in the deaths of a further 16,000¹ people, as well as chronic and debilitating illnesses for thousands of others. The plant site has not been adequately cleaned up so toxic wastes continue to pollute the environment and groundwater that surrounding communities rely on. The Supreme Court passed an order instructing the Madhya Pradesh government to supply fresh drinking water to people whose potable water supplies were contaminated by pollutants from the plant. To date, the state government had yet to fully implement the Supreme Court order to provide fresh water to these communities. AI has received reports that the water supply provided is far from being sufficient, and has not been provided on a regular basis.

In May 2008 Amnesty International has renewed its appeal to the Indian Prime Minister to take decisive and effective actions to address the long standing concerns of the people of Bhopal. In particular the organization has urged him to:

- ensure a regular supply of adequate safe water for the domestic use of the affected communities
- make available adequate health care that takes into account the long-term impacts of the gas leak
- ensure satisfactory clean-up of the factory site in order to contain further damage to the environment
- take all possible step, in line with India's international human rights obligations, to provide the victims with full information on the leak and its actual and potential impacts on their- and future generations –health and safety
- take urgent and decisive actions to address the outstanding problems of compensation and accountability

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, Spanish or your own language:

- Calling on the PM to agree to meet a delegation of people from Bhopal, now in Delhi in order to agree decisive actions to address the long-standing concerns of the people of Bhopal.
- Ensure a prompt, impartial, thorough and transparent investigation into police brutality of the 9th June is carried out and examine whether the use of force by police was consistent with national law and international standards including the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms, and the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, and those found responsible for committing human rights violations be brought to justice;.
- Ensure adequate compensation is provided to those who have suffered harm as a result of excessive use of force;
- Urging the Governments of India and Madhya Pradesh to act expeditiously to ensure regular supply of adequate safe water for the domestic use of all affected communities

¹ According to the Indian Council of Medical Research

APPEALS TO:

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Prime Minister

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COPIES TO:

to diplomatic representatives of India accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.

For more information on the struggle of people of Bhopal see: www.bhopal.net/