

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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India: Protestors who want clean drinking water face excessive and unnecessary police force

Amnesty International is concerned about reports of excessive and unnecessary use of force against protesters by police in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh on 17 May 2005. Amnesty International has received reports of police violence at approximately 12:30 on 17 May 2005 against some 300 protesters, including women and children. The protesters were opposing the failure of the Madhya Pradesh state government to provide clean drinking water to the communities affected by the ongoing contamination of the former Union Carbide plant in Bhopal.

Amnesty International calls for a prompt, impartial, thorough and transparent investigation into the incident to 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.

Amnesty International wishes to remind the authorities in Madhya Pradesh that under international standards, the use of force by law enforcement officials must be exceptional, and that force may be used only when strictly necessary and to the extent required for the performance of their duty.

Following such investigation, any officials reasonably suspected of having breached national law or international standards on the use of force should be brought to justice in proceedings which meet international standards of fairness. Those who have suffered harm as a result of excessive use of force should also be adequately compensated.

According to reliable sources, the protesters entered the Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation office in Bhopal at around 11:30 am. Reportedly no one stopped the protesters from entering the building. While in the building, they chanted slogans and beat steel plates with spoons. Police, including 15 male police officers in riot gear, reportedly arrived on the scene around 12:30 and informed the protesters that no authorities were available to speak with them. Then, the police allegedly forcibly removed protesters, including pushing them down stairs, kicking some women in the chest and stomach, and beating people with sticks. Seven of the protesters were reportedly arrested, charged under the Indian Penal Code and held for approximately four hours.

The protesters were expressing concern that the 7 May 2004 directive of the Supreme Court of India to supply clean water to those communities affected by contaminated ground water from the Union Carbide factory site has not been implemented. Amnesty International calls on the Governments of India and Madhya Pradesh to fully implement the directive, ensuring a regular supply of adequate safe water for the domestic use of the affected communities

Background

In November 2004, Amnesty International released a report *Clouds of Injustice – Bhopal Disaster 20 years on*. The report documented human rights violations on a massive scale of those affected by the Bhopal gas leak in December 1984 and subsequent pollution, including people's rights to life and health, remedy, adequate standard of living as well as other rights.

Twenty one years ago around half a million people were exposed to toxic chemicals during a catastrophic gas leak from a pesticide plant in Bhopal, India. More than 7,000 people died within days. A further 15,000 died in the following years. Around 100,000 people are suffering chronic and debilitating illnesses for which treatment is largely ineffective.

A full set of Amnesty International recommendations addressing the human rights violations linked to the Bhopal gas leak and subsequent pollution can be found in the report at:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA200152004?open&of=ENG-IND>