

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Open Letter

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India: Bhopal survivors march 800km in search of justice

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Dr. Manmohan Singh
Honourable Prime Minister of India
South Block, Raisina Hill,
New Delhi,
India-110 011

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to convey the concerns of thousands of Amnesty International members and supporters around the world who have signed a petition urging the Indian Government to ensure the immediate supply of regular and sufficient piped drinking water to the communities in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, in compliance with the 2004 Indian Supreme Court order.

I also urge you to heed the request of the Bhopal survivors, many of whom have walked 800 km to New Delhi, for a meeting with you to address their demands.

In December 2004, Amnesty International published a report to mark the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal disaster. As you know, in December 1984 a gas leak from a pesticide plant in Bhopal owned by Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL), the Indian affiliate of the US-based multinational Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), killed more than 7,000 people and affected hundreds of thousands within days. In the past two decades, at least 15,000 more people have died and more than 100,000 suffer from chronic illness related to gas exposure. To date, no one has been held to account for the gas leak and its disastrous consequences that continue to affect people and the environment.

The contaminated plant site has not yet been cleaned up. As a result, toxic wastes continue to pollute the environment and contaminate water that the surrounding communities rely on. Despite an order from the Indian Supreme Court in May 2004 instructing the Madhya Pradesh government to supply clean drinking water, the state government has not yet fully complied with the order. More than a year ago, on 9-10 March

2005 the state government and Supreme Court officials agreed on important steps to supply all affected communities with sufficient drinking water, including the presentation of a plan for permanent supply of drinking water. Although these commitments were to be fulfilled within the next four weeks, to Amnesty International's knowledge no steps have been taken and the Madhya Pradesh government has reportedly failed to date to act on the order of the Supreme Court. Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the lack of enforcement of the Supreme Court's order and the consequent lack of regular and sufficient drinking water that leaves the Bhopal victims with no option but to continue drinking contaminated water.

Amnesty International is also concerned about reports of the detention on 28 March in New Delhi of 300 protestors who were peacefully demonstrating in front of the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, many of whom were Bhopal victims who had walked for five weeks to present their demands. At least two of the victims have complained that they were assaulted by police and required hospitalization.

On behalf of Amnesty International, I appeal to you to:

- take immediate steps to ensure regular supply of adequate safe water for the domestic use of the affected communities in line with the order issued by the Supreme Court;
- ensure the immediate clean up of the factory site in order to contain further damage to the ground water and environment;
- ensure a prompt, impartial, thorough and transparent investigation into the policing of the demonstrations described above, examine whether the use of force by police was consistent with national law and international standards, and ensure that anyone found responsible for excessive use of force be held accountable.

I understand the Bhopal survivors who have marched to New Delhi are seeking to meet with you. I hope you will agree to receive the Bhopal survivors and inform them of the steps that you intend to take to address their demands.

Yours sincerely,

Irene Khan
Secretary General

Cc. Madhya Pradesh Government

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