

Speech of Rachna Dhingra, International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal, India at the Public Eye on Davos 2005

Salam and Hello To all Brothers and Sisters

My name is Rachna, and I come from Bhopal. Well, I have only spent the last two years of my life in Bhopal but have been involved with ICJB for last 4 years. I bring this message to you from people of Bhopal whom I work with, live with and fight for a safer world.

When I first moved to Bhopal, the place seemed to like every other small city in India with crazy traffic, amazing bazaars, and known for its palaces and all night poetry sessions known as mushairas. The city of Bhopal seemed full of life, but it is when you talk to people irrespective of religion, gender, caste and occupation, the events of 2nd-3rd Dec, 1984 (20 years ago) seems to haunt them even today. It is when I talk to gas survivors standing in long lines in the hospitals waiting to get treatment for their illnesses that they have been suffering for last 20 years

It is when you stop and notice that this city has more hospitals and pharmacy shops than any other small city in India. I see the ongoing environmental disaster when people living in the water contaminated communities have to fight everyday with municipality officials just to get 2 buckets of clean water. I see it in teenage girls who are too embarrassed to talk about that she hasn't started menstruating even at the age of 17 or 18. I see it in young women who have reached menopause at the age of 28 or 30. I see it in young men who are ashamed for not being able to provide for their family because they are too sick to work. I also see it in parents who cannot forget the horror of the night when they look at the stunted growth of their children or the dilemma a mother faces when she has to breast feed her baby and her breast milk is laced with mercury. I see anger in every Bhopali eyes because the people and corporation responsible for their ongoing suffering still remain unpunished.

On the night of 2nd Dec, 1984, 27 tons of MIC leaked out of an ill designed pesticide plant of Union Carbide in Bhopal, India. The gas killed 8,000-10,000 people immediately and injured more than 500,000 people in the city of Bhopal. The new owner of Union Carbide is Dow Chemical. 20 years after the disasterthis is the track record of Dow-Carbide in Bhopal

- More than 20,000 people dead since the day of the disaster
- 15-20 people die every month due to exposure related problems
- More than 150,000 chronically sick people who are too sick to work.
- More than 20,000 who are forced to drink contaminated water laced with mercury, lead, lindane, BHC, dichlorobenzene and trichlorobenzene on a daily basis.
- Outstanding criminal and civil charges in Bhopal against Warren Anderson and Dow-carbide and corporation who are still absconding.
- Thousands of tons of highly toxic chemicals in drums still lay abandoned in the Union Carbide factory where small children play and animal graze.

DOW keeps claiming Trade Secrets: People Continue to Die

Dow-Carbide is responsible for creating a medical disaster in Bhopal: DOW-Carbide still has not released medical and toxicological information of the gases that leaked on the night of the disaster calling it a trade secret and people continue to die every day. More than 150,000 still suffer from severe illnesses due to damage caused to almost every system of their bodies. Conditions like breathing difficulties, chronic fatigue, joint pain, inflammation, panic attacks, anxiety, and barrage of menstrual problems in women. The second generation of gas survivors has also not been spared by the effects of toxic gases of Dow-Carbide. A study carried out by Sambhanva Trust was published in JAMA on Oct 2003 which stated that children born to exposed parents are shorter, thinner, lighter, and their upper bodies are disproportionate to their lower bodies when compared to children born to unexposed parents with the same socio economic status.

The story of the Bhopal disaster is also partly a story of corporate abuse and indifference. Bhopal has become a symbol of corporate irresponsibility and DOW the epitome of the corporate criminal. Dow has always tried to hide behind the corporate veil and denied all liability for Bhopal simply stating that GOI and Union Carbide reached an out of court settlement for \$470 million and it absolved Dow-Carbide of any further charges. This is simple wrong since civil and criminal suits are still pending both in India and in the US courts. The \$470 million settlement which came to \$500 for 90% of the victims also didn't cover damage to people's health, property and the environment resulting from years of Union Carbide pollution.

DOW AND ITS DOUBLE STANDARDS

From the beginning Dow's PR machinery has put all its energy in denying responsibility for Bhopal. Whereas in 2002 Dow accepted the asbestos liability of Union Carbide in Texas and make an out of court settlement with the workers who brought the case against them.

Dow agrees that \$500 given to gas survivor is just and equitable because DOW's own PR person, Mrs Kathy Hunt said herself that \$500 is pretty good for an Indian whereas Dow paid \$10 million to a child in the US in an out of court settlement for health damage resulting from exposure to Dow's Dursban pesticide.

In 1995, EPA fined DOW \$732,000 in for failing to disclose reports for adverse effects associated with the use of and exposure to Dursban. Dow continues to maintain that Dusban is safe, but entered into voluntary agreement to remove Dursban from over the counter products in USA by the end of 2000. Dow not only sells Dursban in India claiming that is safe for home use, but it also manufactures Dursban in India.

DOW's Idea of Dialogue

Dow has always claimed that they would like a dialogue with the Bhopal survivors. So when we went to Dow-India's office in Bombay along with 200 bhopal survivors for a peaceful protest they had the activists and survivors prosecuted and sued for "loss of work" damages amounting to more than 10 yearly salaries. Dow has sued the activist and survivors both times we went for peaceful protests.

Dow has committed several crimes against humanity. Their rap sheet includes Agent Orange, Napalm, largest producer of Dioxin known to cause cancers, DDT, Napalm, Dursban, silicone breast implants, Asbestos, etc. Dow has contributed significantly towards Genetic Modification, Global Warming, War and Toxic Waste Sites around the world.

The list goes on and the more and more people have Dow's poisons in their body. Thanks to Dow it is Living Poisoned Daily for more and more people living on this planet.

Today at World Economic Forum Dow is talking about "Taking Responsibilities for Tough Choices." Dow knows nothing about Taking Responsibility for Tough choices. You should ask that mother who contemplates feeding her child contaminated water or breast milk laced with mercury. Dow should ask that young woman who had a spontaneous miscarriage after inhaling their toxic gases and now cannot get compensation because she has to prove whether she was really pregnant on the night of the disaster. Dow should ask that father who cannot decide if from his daily wages of Rs 50 if he should feed his family or buy medicines for his sick family.

The Dow Chemical company has violated the following human rights of people of Bhopal.

Right to Life

Right to the highest attainable standard of health

Right to Remedy

Right to adequate standard of living

Right to safe environment

Dow being the largest chemical company of the world with annual sales of \$33 billion and it operates in more than 37 countries and serves more than 180 countries. The world's poorest people are fighting against one of the richest companies of the world, but important thing to remember is with our efforts this fight is not only being fought but also being won. Bhopal is also a story of grassroots struggle for basic survival and for social and environmental justice.

On the occasion of the 20th more than 323 organizations held actions against DOW all over to world. More than 70 universities all over the world protested against Dow, which marked the biggest protest Dow Chemical have seen against them since Vietnam War. This has only been possible because of the tremendous support shown by the international community.

Justice for Bhopal means a Safer World for all of us. So brothers and sisters repeat after me. Repeat this beautiful verse after me written by a Bhopal activist, Terry Allan.

We are women of the world, we are flames not flowers

We will not wilt before your corporate power

With our brooms in hand we're gonna sweep you away

Cause we'll fight for justice till our dyin' day

And for your crimes against humanity

We're gonna bring Dow Chemical to its knees.

Thank You

Davos, 26 January 2005

<http://www.evb.ch/publicityondavos.htm>