## Union Carbide, may God forgive you

To the directors of Union Carbide: You have known for more than ten years that your derelict factory in Bhopal is lethally contaminated and that there was a threat of toxic chemicals leaking into the ground water and thus into our wells. You did not warn us. We found out from your own secret documents after a court in New York last month ordered you to hand them over. Because of your gases, our people are ravaged by illness, but for years we have puzzled why people who weren't in Bhopal when your factory blew up were getting ill with symptoms like those of the gas survivors. You knew, but did not tell us. What kind of people are you, to keep quiet when you must have known that the poisons leaking into our water could cause cancers and birth defects among the very same people whose families your gases killed eighteen years ago?

WHEN YOU BUILT your factory, you promised us it was for good. You told us – those of us who lived in the shadow of your steel towers and could smell their stench - 'We are making kheti ki dawai, medicine for the fields'. You never said you were making poisons.

It's eighteen years since that night, the night no one who survived it will ever forget. You did not wake with your eyes burning to tell your crying, innocent children, 'Go back to sleep darling, it's only someone burning chilis.' You weren't there when it did not stop

and our lungs caught fire, as if someone had thrust live coals down our throats. You weren't with us when we fled from our houses into the yelling and screams and confusion, the cows running too and trampling us in their terror.

Where were you when we began falling, thousands of us, to lie like rag bundles, like the sacks of poison you used to employ our men to stack with bare hands in your factory?

Only on that night did we learn the truth about that factory of yours. It was manufacturing death. The deaths you'd planned were those of insects, but you killed us instead. Was there much difference, to you?

We saw you, coming from Shamla Hills in your big cars, looking neither left nor right as the gates of your factory opened and the guards saluted. You did not see us, our houses, our lanes, shops, strings of washing, signs for Ganesh Beedis and Shalimar Dry Cleaning. For you we didn't really exist.

You certainly never treated us as people, because you wouldn't tell our doctors what had leaked or how to treat it. You said these were 'trade secrets'.

You were interested, but not in us. You sent a man to Bhopal to question our doctors. We know all about him now, but for years he was a sinister legend. He'd worked with chemical weapons, hadn't he? – testing them on animals and people too. He was interested in the effects of cyanide. That's why he came. Not to help us, but to watch us die and make notes about how long

Your man didn't stay to see what overtook us in the months that followed, nausea, breathlessness, headaches, giddiness, aches that seemed to bend our bones. He left, but these things didn't. As months became years, you showed no further interest in us – in our cancers, the epidemic of menstrual problems, the terrifying births – none of these things did you ever enquire about. You never thought of us again.

You did your best to avoid paying compensation. Your gases injured half a million people in our city



recent reports in local and national news papers. The seriousness of the issue needs no elaboration. It is earnestly suggested that the subject be given due consideration and studies initiated without further delay. If the situation so requires, the work may be carried out primarily for our own understanding of the situation, in the first phase. In the following paragraphs a summary of preliminary work carried out in 1989 is described.

Analysis of samples drawn by plant personnel in and effluent treatment pits inside the plant were sent to R and D. They consisted of nine soil/soild samples and eight liquid samples. The solid samples had organic contamination varying from 10% to 100% and contained known ingredients like naphthol and naphthalene in substantial quantities.

Majority of the liquid samples contained naphthol and/or

fish in toxicity assessment studies and were to be diluted several fold to render them suitable for survival

Carbide knew of the danger to water in 1989, but kept denying there was a problem. People did not know they were being poisoned until the Greenpeace report in 1999.

torture me

AIM A BLOWTORCH AT MY EYES POUR ACID DOWN MY THROAT STRIP THE TISSUE FROM MY LUNGS DROWN ME IN MY OWN BLOOD CHOKE MY BABY TO DEATH IN FRONT OF ME, FORCE ME TO WATCH HER STRUGGLES AS SHE DIES -CRIPPLE MY CHILDREN, LET PAIN BE THEIR DAILY AND ONLY PLAYMATI

SPARE ME NOTHING RUIN MY HEALTH SO I CAN NO LONGER WORK OR FEED MY FAMILY -WATCH US STARVE – SEE MY CHILDREN DRINKING WATER AT NIGHT TO FILL

THEIR HUNGRY BELLIES

THEN POISON OUR DRINKING WATER NEVER WARN US OF THE DANGER CAUSE MONSTERS TO BE BORN AMONG US MAKE US CURSE GOD

Photo: Andy Moxon

STUNT OUR LIVING CHILDREN'S GROWTH SAY IT'S NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU DON'T EVER SAY SORRY

FOR EIGHTEEN LONG YEARS IGNORE OUR CRIES AND TEACH ME

THAT MY RAGE IS AS USELESS AS MY TEARS PROVE TO ME BEYOND ALL DOUBT THERE'S NO JUSTICE IN THIS WORLD YOU ARE AN AMERICAN CORPORATION AND I AM A WOMAN OF BHOPAL

the survivor's poem

and you threatened to cross-examine every one of them. You asked the court to allow a day per witness. It would have taken 1,500 years. Isn't this why the Supreme Court settled with you, so we would at least get something before all of us were dead? You ended up paying a pittance. Over eighteen years it works out at enough to buy one cup of tea per day. It doesn't even buy aspirin. Meanwhile we were still dying. How we died! To date, you have achieved at least 20,000 victims.

You didn't just take our loved ones. You took our livings. Most of us worked very hard - pulling loads, carrying things - long hours on meagre diets. We were among the poorest people on earth, you among the richest, but you turned us into beggars and then turned your back on us.

You locked the gates of your factory and left. But the stink still hangs there, eighteen years later. You never bothered to clean it up. We know, you see, because we've been in. We've gone through the gaps in the wall to stop our children playing among the heaps of brown rocks that have tumbled from rotting tanks. They're not rocks, they're lumps of poison.

You've never been back – you didn't come even when our court ordered you to appear. You were Americans, you said. Indian courts had no powers

So you don't know that in your factory, no birds sing. This isn't magic. There's nothing for the birds to eat. The ground is poisoned. In many places, drops of mercury lie gleaming on the ground. In your solar evaporation ponds are thousands of tons of toxic sludge. When the rains turned them into lakes, children used to splash in them and cows drank there. No more. Since we got hold of your

secret papers, we know you filled the ponds with some of the most dangerous chemicals ever made. We know that drinking from the wells you contaminated can cause cancers, liver damage and birth defects.

If it seems surprising that people who never went to school have taught themselves chemistry and medicine, the reason is that we learned a long time ago to expect nothing from the giant US corporation that killed our families, ruined our lives and now hides like a toxic Jonah inside Dow Chemical's whale. We had to help ourselves, so we started our own clinic, where gas-affected people are treated free.

It is called Sambhavna, 'possibility', and is run for survivors by survivors - most of our staff are gas-affected. No one is turned

away. The poorest are welcomed with dignity. We offer modern medicine along with traditional Indian ayurveda. We pioneered the use of yoga breathing and massage for lung patients. (See www.bhopal.org)

Sambhavna has just won the Margaret Mead award, which is given to small groups of people who make a real difference in the world. The prize also belongs to the readers of this newspaper.

Guardian readers gave the money to start Sambhavna and have kept it running for six years. Thank you, God bless your good hearts.

Our need this year is urgent as ever.

The people we treat cannot be cured, but their suffering can be eased. Please be as generous as you were last year. We value your support as much as your donation. There may be no justice in this world, but there are a lot of good people.

That alone keeps us alive.

## FREEFONE 0800 316 5577 TO DONATE NOW WITH A CARD or visit www.bhopal.org/donations

'There may be no justice in the w	orld, but there are good people, and that alone kee	eps us alive' - bhopal survivor	
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