

SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR BHOPAL SURVIVORS

"My husband is sick and is incapable of doing his carpentry regularly and the compensation money is already spent on treatment and other domestic expenses. Where do I go? And how does the government expect us to survive?"

Shamshad Bi, 42-year-old gas survivor from Jai Prakash Nagar.
Source: Amnesty International

To date the government has no record of the social condition of the persons who have been widowed, orphaned, or have been permanently disabled as a result of the gas disaster.

There has been no official attention directed towards the urgent need of lifelong pension for these suffering people. The state government has deemed its work of social rehabilitation to be complete after constructing a few schools and just under 2500 houses in a settlement called the 'Widows Colony'.

The Fact Finding Mission of Bhopal of 1999-2004 found that less than half of gas-affected workers were able to continue in their pre-1984 occupations and that 32% have been rendered completely unemployed.

Children who were orphaned by the 1984 gas disaster were never given more than a pittance and today are left in their 20's without educations and little to keep them afloat, especially when burdened with medical expenses for treatment of gas-related health problems.



The main attempt the government has made at social support for Bhopal survivors has been housing programme whose intention was to provide low cost housing through an ambitious scheme to 40,000 victims. The plan, however, was finally revised to only 3,000 houses, of which only 2486 were constructed by March 1999 and only 1666 were occupied.

Right now the only social safety net Bhopal's gas survivors have to fall back on is the social security pension given to people over 60 years old and widowed women and orphans. This is only 150 rupees per month - about £2, or \$3.50 USD per month.

What Is Needed

First, thorough research must be conducted to identify and locate those in need of social support as a direct or indirect result of the gas disaster in Bhopal. Then a comprehensive social safety net must be put in place for people who have lost income earners and people who are either too old or too disabled to support themselves. A National Commission on Bhopal must set up a dedicated Social Welfare Fund for this purpose.

Who Must Provide It

The central government and its Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers is responsible for the welfare of people affected by gas and contamination in Bhopal. Both the government of India and the state government of Madhya Pradesh have been legally bound to respect, protect, and fulfill the human rights laws of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 11 of which states:

"The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing, and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions."

Additionally, Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

WE DEMAND that the central government set up a National Commission on Bhopal with the necessary authority and funds to thoroughly locate and distribute necessary and full social support to those orphaned, widowed, or otherwise left unable to support themselves because of the damage inflicted by Union Carbide / Dow Chemical in Bhopal. The Commission must have active participation of non-government organisations and representatives of survivor's organisations.

**This padyatra is our march for justice and dignity. We shall struggle until our last breath.
21 years is enough!**

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"First the government said 'grow up, become adults and we will provide you jobs.' Once we became adults they said 'now that you have grown up you take care of yourself.'"

Shahid, orphaned by the gas disaster. Source: Amnesty International