

# **AID Conference 2004**

## ***Minutes for Session: Bhopal Cell***

**Date:** May 29<sup>th</sup>, 04

**Time From:** 3.45 pm

**To:** 4.45 pm

**Minutes Taken By:** Gauri

**Number of attendees:** 17

**Audio/Visual Component?** No

### **Speaker/Panelist Names:**

1. Ryan Bodanyi

Ryan is the coordinator for the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB).

### **What they are speaking about:**

1. The plans for the Bhopal campaign for the rest of the year.
2. AID's specific role and contribution in the campaign
3. Brainstorm at the end on action items and chapter specific activities

### **Main Presentation:**

During last 3 years or so,. since the formation of International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB), there have been some significant victories for the campaign.

Have an unprecedented global support at this time including the a great number of chapter participation in AID. Though there are still a lot of people not aware of the current situation, so need to keep telling them its an ongoing tragedy. People still associate Bhopal with the gas-leak and not understanding the continuing fight for justice and contamination issues are current problems.

Some recent victories -

- Representatives from women survivors - Champa Devi and Rashida Bi winning the Goldman prize for environment.
- A series of articles were published in main stream media such as wall street, forbes etc. The consistent media coverage adds pressure on Dow and the Indian govt.
- On Feb 24 was the phone and email campaign day to the Indian embassies to provide clean drinking water for the communities affected by the groundwater contamination and also provide adequate compensation. Delhi University students met with the President on the issue. Supreme Court later ordered clean drinking water to be provided to the community.
- Recent US NY court decision on the contamination at the site. Ground water contamination etc. Case is an imp thing since if it hears from Indian govt, it will force Dow to clean up. Indian govt must state that no objection
- The widespread 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary In Dec across several countries and universities, even in Indian Universities. The action targeted Dow board of directors delivering the contaminated water to them.
- Apr 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>: AID served the board with summons to UC for case in India

In essence, AID has been an integral part of the campaign and will be an important component going forward.

### **What next for AID?**

Some information was passed around. List of various actions that each chapter do for this campaign. It is available on the studentsforbhopal.org site.

Campus involvement is important. Passing resolutions from university showing the solidarity. Get faculty to sign the petition online. Need at least 2000 of them. This will not only targeting Dow, but also make it controversial on campus. (Don't invest or accept funds from Dow). Even if it does not succeed, it makes Dow controversial. Continue participation in days of action – candlelight vigil, screening, protests, etc. Plan for the upcoming 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary actions in December.

Second, AID should work on development aspects in Bhopal. Assess development work opportunity in Bhopal. ICJB will need support to hire full-time people to work on the income generation projects.. Need for solar lanterns is seen now. Renting them will be economically viable. Can be made locally. Such proposals will come out soon, so it will be great to get funds for them.

Third, sustained advocacy with the government of India is extremely important. According to a recent May 17<sup>th</sup> ruling, NY district has given the Indian government until June 30<sup>th</sup> to submit a no objection letter if UC is ordered to clean up the site. \$500 M for a cleanup is not a big deal for Dow. It has money but doesn't want to do it. Else the money will come out of Indian taxpayers. Action is planned for the rest of the month. If the government does not respond in a timely manner than Sathyu and survivors will go on indefinite fast. AID should coordinate a campaign here and target the Indian consulates.

Fourth, a long term goal for AID is to build a broader network of NRIs. Makes easy to create pressure in a short time.

Gautam: Talked about personal experience in Bhopal. Shivani and he spent 5 days. Met orphans, etc talking about livelihood options. They found out: 1. There is a stationary workers union, no experience in micro-credits or other livelihood schemes. On these women role of leadership was

thrust upon. Its not a traditional women's group. There can be frictions between women and orgs working on Bhopal issue. So livelihood program is not only a livelihood program. People from campaign are not paid. Paying people for such programs, we might create some division ? How to integrate it in the campaign. If you ask people what they want to do, average people are not asking for environment sustainable jobs. For them what sells is what is good.

Dow will be held accountable, maybe in some years and we get abstract justice. But people are still suffering now. So there are question on what justice means is relative to the timeframe. So trade off between welfare oriented battles. So there are risks involves at this stage of the campaign and lot of issues will have to be addressed. A livelihood project is not like a normal one, but its effects have to be kept in mind all the time.

Nishant suggests that Rachna being there should help handle some of these questions. (We are not an outside agency.) Gautam: He hopes that Rachna has time and interest in getting deeply involved in a livelihood project. We have to integrate any such project with the campaign itself.

Vol 1: Why isn't there a common base for various organizations and survivors in Bhopal.

R: The law suite in US is only one example of it. Lot of personalities conflicts etc and the resentments etc are there.

Gauri: Can we get Bhopal and NBA work together? Also need to take advantage of left party stuff.

R: We should take action on June 30<sup>th</sup> deadline. It should be used.

Satish, Cincinnati: Forming a coalition on campus. Trying to pass ..on campus. Considered a skit. Wants to show it. Will help a chapter that is interested.

Ani: Suggestion that for immediate action, is there a way to make our action most effective. Based on a date picked in Bhopal, we will pick a date, Is there a way to come up with a group of 3-4 ppl and come with a date that will be best.

Nishant: Do it over 2-3 days, like 3 continuous days

Nishant: in this since 1999. Till this earlier year only advocacy. we are at a fork. AID Austin will present the divestment proposal at student senate this fall. Have collected enough signatures. Now project based efforts, how to integrate it with the campaign. Encourages us supporting ICJB (awareness, calls, etc.) More chapters should take this up. And more mature chapters should focus on what is next. (take it to the next level). Other chapters can then follow the lead. That might be most effective. Ani and he to set action for June 30<sup>th</sup> deadline. Should focus on it for the next month.

Ani: Activism related process has begun over last year, Now people actively involved in Bhopal should look at the bigger picture. Like ICJB, overall strategy and goals should be revised in AID.

Vol 1: Doing ground work in Bhopal in a small area will be good.

R: Is there an existing mechanism>

A: Need to start focus group in this area within AID. For any long term campaigns, there should be long term planning. Focus group with some interested ppl in it.

G: A small group of Bhopal.

A: Amongst the AID-Bhopal group, a small core group should be identified that will help define the strategy.

R: Can help Nishant do this. Have 3-4 ppl.

N: Announce on AID Bhopal group.

R: studentsforbhopal.org has all relevant information.

