Press Statement              April 29, 2020

**12 out of 13 COVID-19 deaths in Bhopal are of those who were exposed to toxic gases of Union Carbide in 1984.**

On March 21, 2020 the organisations working among the survivors of the world’s worst industrial disaster had written a letter to several state & central govt officials and bringing on record the data which shows that gas victims are 5 times more vulnerable to COVID-19 than general population and had sought urgent intervention towards providing essential services of testing and critical care to the gas affected population in view of their heightened vulnerability to the COVID – 19 pandemic. “While no steps were taken by the state or central government to address this critical issue 12 ouf of 13 COVID-19 deaths in Bhopal are of Bhopal gas victims. 12 gas victims have died untimely deaths due to criminal negligence of the governments at state & centre as special attention was not paid to their medical needs, said Rashida Bee of Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationary Karmchari Sangh.

The analysis of 12 deaths clearly shows that: all were male, all were gas victims and were taking chronic care for their lung, heart & kidney illnesses, 95% of them were above the age of 55years. Out of 12 deaths, 4 died outside the gates of the hospital, 7 died within 24hrs of admission and only 2 got prolonged care, which is a clear indication that lack of prompt care was one of the reason of their deaths. None of the deceased family members has been given any medical records or COVID-19 positive test reports. All died in government hospitals which barely has the infrastructure to take care of so many critical cases. The analysis of deaths & concrete suggestions was provided to officials of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt of India, ICMR, Health Commissioner, GOMP, Collector-Bhopal and to many others so that lessons can be learnt & changes could be made accordingly but sadly it looks like even this letter has met the same fate as the earlier one, said Rachna Dhingra of Bhopal Group for Information & Action.

The Supreme Court appointed Monitoring Committee took cognisance of the letter dated 23rd April of the survivor organisations and has asked ICMR institutes Bhopal Memorial Hospital & Research Centre (BMHRC) and National Institute for Research on Environmental Health (NIREH) & Dept of Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief & Rehabilitation, GOMP to ensure COVID-19 testing of all gas victims in view of their vulnerability. It also all three agencies to provide super speciality treatment to gas victims and has asked NIREH to carry out COVID-19 testing as they have all the relevant infrastructure.

The ICMR’s (indian council of medical research) 31st institute NIREH (National Institute for Research in Environmental Health) whose mandate is to carry out research on the morbidities and long term impact of exposure related illnesses. This institute has a list of the most vulnerable i.e. persons above 60 and with co-morbidities such as Diabetes, Hypertension, COPD, Heart & Kidney problems & Cancers in the gas exposed population and in the last one month they have not moved an inch in screening, testing any of the gas victims as they have been observing the lockdown. This is nothing more than a dereliction of the duty, said Nousheen Khan of Children Against Dow-Carbide.

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| **Rashida Bi,** | **Nawab Khan,** | **Rachna Dhingra,**  **Satinath Sarangi** | **Nausheen Khan** |
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