

CROSS PARTY GROUP: INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

18 SEPTEMBER 2012

COMMITTEE ROOM 5, SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

5.30PM – 7PM

Attendees: Sarah Boyack MSP, John Mason MSP, Siobhan McMahon MSP, Alison Johnstone MSP, Patrick Harvie MSP, Alice Picard, Gary Cocker (office of Jean Urquhart MSP), Rachel Heydecker (office of Humza Yousuf MSP), Fiona Trafton, Richard Ellis, David Stevenson, John Blair-Fish, Colin Pritchard, Robert England, Gerda Siann, John Kapolon, Kathy Jenkins, Eurig Scandrett, Backrishna Namdev, Safreen Khan, Anuj Kapilashrami, James Onchieku, Gabriel Quannsahm Edward Calys-Tagoe, Nellie Odour, Roda Kilouzi, Anthony Olowoyeye

Apologies: Linda Fabiani MSP, Jackie Baillie MSP, John M Francis, Grant Davidson, Alan Dixon, Carol Morton, Claire Telfer, Michelagh O'Neill, Graham Ault, Agnes Ngulube Holmes, Andy Mount, Paul Jowitt, Tom Ponton, Michael Freudenberg, Lorna McDonald.

Welcome and Introduction:

Sarah Boyack MSP chaired the meeting in her capacity as Convenor. She welcomed everyone for attending and thanked her MSP colleagues for attending and showing an interest in discussing the Bhopal disaster.

Sarah acknowledged that to many people across the world the Bhopal disaster is a part of history, but for thousands it is a current issue and continues to ruin lives today. Although compensation of about £300m was eventually paid out to victims, there is a widespread consensus that the aftermath of the disaster has been marred by corruption, mismanagement, a lack of corporate responsibility, environmental degradation and long term health impacts on the local population.

Eurig Scandrett, Convenor of the Scottish Friends of Bhopal:

Eurig addressed the group and made the point that it is difficult to know how many lives have been affected. He provided a brief history of the disaster, highlighting that Union Carbide had moved into India during the 1960's/1970's as part of the 'green revolution'. He highlighted concerns that after 28 years, the factory site has never been cleaned up and remains a source of pollution.

Safreen Khan:

Ms Khan is a second generation survivor of the Bhopal gas disaster and provided a harrowing account of what it is like to live in an area that has been polluted and with contaminated water. She has developed health problems due to exposure to pollution and although there are medical centres nearby, there are often long queues and a lack of doctors on site. Ms Khan advised that there is great discontent that the Government have failed to provide safe drinking water. This has led to protests, including a march from Bhopal to Delhi (800km) and to people chaining themselves to the gates outside the Prime Minister's residence.

Backrishna Namdev:

Mr Namdev thanked the Scottish Parliament and the Cross Party Group for the opportunity to speak about his experience. He has experienced severe health problems and it has been a long struggle. He is of the view that there needed to be accountability from the State Government. Mr Namdev highlighted the key issues that he has campaigned on:

- The state and the company have been negligent and not cleaned up the chemicals;
- There has been insufficient support for Bhopal survivors and the local community;
- People suffering physical and mental disabilities caused by the gas disaster have not been given proper medical support or compensation.

Questions and Answers:

During the discussion which followed, concerns were raised that Dow Chemicals (who purchased Union Carbide Corporations (UCC) in 2001) have sponsored the Olympics for twenty years despite widespread concern about the legacy left after the disaster. In discussion criticisms were raised of the Indian Government that it had not acted firmly in the interests of the people of Bhopal.

Next Steps:

With the agreement of the meeting Sarah Boyack MSP offered to contact the following people:

- The UK Government;
- Consulate General of India;
- The organisers of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games;
- To raise these matters with Holyrood Magazine.

Any other competent business:

Mr Bob Kerr of Openstreetmap.org addressed the group to highlight the work of the organisation who are currently making a free map of the entire world. He indicated that only 20% of the world have up to date maps and has invited the cross party group members to an Openstreetmap.org conference. Details can be found at:

http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/State_Of_The_Map_Scotland_2012

Sarah closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and she also extended her invite to members who may wish to come to the African Diaspora & Development Hearing: A Dialogue with Policy makers that has been organised by AFFORD on 27 September 2012. The conference runs from 9:30 AM – 5.00 PM at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, 43-45 High Street, Edinburgh and to secure your place please contact silencechihuri@googlemail.com or onyekachi@afford-uk.org. The programme of the event has been attached.

Next meeting: 6th November 2012, Committee Room 5, the Scottish Parliament.