

International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal

14 July, 2008. Mumbai/New Delhi -- Nearly 500 individuals, mostly alumni of IIT Bombay, and 43 faculty of the institute have condemned the organizers of the 2008 IIT-Bombay Golden Jubilee Conference for accepting Dow Chemical as a Gold Sponsor despite the company's tarnished reputation and callous disregard for Indian law. The Conference is to be organized by the IIT Bombay Heritage Fund from 18-20 July, 2008, in New York. IIT alumni from Australia, Canada, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Italy, USA, UK and various parts of India have emailed Jubilee organizers Anil Kshirsagar and Suresh Shenoy condemning the collaboration. The organizers have failed to respond to any of the concerns raised about Dow, even after phone calls were made by various alumni. Expressing their solidarity with the Bhopal victims, who are currently on the fourth month of strike in New Delhi, alumni sources handed over both the alumni petition and the open letter by the IIT Bombay faculty to the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal. The letters were released to the press by the campaign and by representatives of IIT Bombay alumni at simultaneous press conferences in Mumbai and New Delhi today.

"Dow's mishandling of its subsidiary Union Carbide's environmental and criminal liabilities in Bhopal, its track record of unethical and illegal business practices, and its disregard for Indian courts disqualifies it in our eyes from any legitimate alliance with institutes that believe in excellence, fair play and dignity of our nation and its people," according to the statement released by four IIT Bombay alumni who released the letters from Delhi and Mumbai. Noted columnist Praful Bidwai and water rights activist Himanshu Thakkar addressed the media in New Delhi. Environmental worker Janak Daftari (former secretary of the Mumbai chapter of the IIT B alumni association) and IIT-B Alumni Association president Dr. Ajit Ranade spoke to the Mumbai press.

Attempts by Dow to develop relationships with IITs have been thwarted by irate students, alumni and faculty of the elite institutes. More than 1000 IITians signed a petition last year urging the IITs to bar Dow from on-campus recruitment or sponsoring programs. The company called off its recruitment plans in Mumbai, Chennai, Kharagpur and New Delhi. IIT Kharagpur's chemical engineering department resolved to not approach Dow for sponsorship of their departmental festival. Meanwhile, IIT Kanpur and IIT Delhi returned Dow's sponsorship money for high-profile conferences at the last minute succumbing to pressure from alumni, faculty and students. In May 2005, more than 1300 alumni wrote to organizers of the Global IIT Conference in the US, and forced them to cancel the invitation extended to then Dow CEO William Stavropoulos who was to deliver the keynote address.

The 43-faculty open letter obtained by the Bhopal campaign from alumni sources is direct in its assessment of the situation. "Dow Chemical clearly aims to acquire legitimacy and credibility by forging relations with IITs. The reputation of IITs will certainly be tarnished by any association with Dow Chemical," the letter notes. A disclaimer states that "This letter is in our capacities as concerned citizens of India, and does not represent an official position of IIT-Bombay.

Dow Chemical continues to shelter its wholly owned subsidiary Union Carbide which is responsible for the 1984 Bhopal disaster and is absconding from related criminal in a Bhopal court. Dow's refusal to clean up thousands of tonnes of toxic waste in and around the abandoned Union Carbide factory in Bhopal is exposing 25,000 residents of neighbourhood communities to contaminated ground water.

For more information, contact:

In Mumbai: Janak Daftari -- 09322292908

In New Delhi: Rachna Dhingra – 09717516003/ 09891442037