

Christians light candles, pray to remember Bhopal industrial disaster

BHOPAL, India - About 100 Christians from various denominations lit candles and observed two minutes of silent prayer to remember victims and survivors of the world's worst industrial tragedy.

"The magnitude of the tragedy was so powerful, even now people are suffering from its aftermath," said Father Anand Muttungal, secretary of the Madhya Pradesh state bishops' commission on ecumenism and dialogue, which organized the event.

About 3,000 people died Dec. 3, 1984, when 40 tons of deadly methyl isocyanate gas escaped from a chemical plant owned by the Union Carbide Corp. in Bhopal.

The state government said 15,000 people subsequently died; nongovernmental organizations put the death toll at more than 20,000. The government also has admitted the gas leak affected around 573,600 survivors.

Many survivors and those born since then suffer from breathing difficulties, gastrointestinal problems, menstrual irregularities, miscarriages and neurological problems, Father Muttungal said. Other common ailments include susceptibility to infections, chromosomal abnormalities and chronic conjunctivitis, he added.

Later generations are paying "a huge price," Father Muttungal said. "We need to become more conscious of the dangers when industries like this build plants around the world."

Father Muttungal said contaminated soil and drinking water have added to survivors' miseries.