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Experts Warn Against New Polluting Industries in SIPCOT Cuddalore

27 September, 2006. Chennai – Members of an expert panel have severely condemned the Tamilnadu Pollution Control Board and the Inspector of Factories for their negligence in dealing with polluting and hazardous industries in SIPCOT, Cuddalore. The panelists have also recommended against the expansion of polluting industries in Cuddalore. They have called upon the Government to respect local sentiments and give up plans for the Chemplast PVC factory, the SIMA Textile Park and the Nagarjuna petroleum refinery. The public hearing was organized by SIPCOT Area Community Environmental Monitoring, Cuddalore District Consumer Protection Organisation and the Community Environmental Monitoring program of The Other Media.

The report titled “Environmental and Human Rights Violations in SIPCOT Complex, Cuddalore” and based on a public hearing and interaction with SIPCOT villagers on 29 July, 2006, was released today by the Public Hearing panel comprising Prof. R. Saraswati, Retd HOD Department of Sociology in Queen Mary’s College, Prof. S. Janakarajan of Madras Institute of Development Studies, and Dr. Rakhal Gaithonde, a community health physician from Community Health Cell. Based on instances observed during the public hearing, the panel concluded that “It is clear that companies with political clout can and do get away with anything in SIPCOT. Such unregulated and corrupt functioning in dealing with highly hazardous industries located in close proximity to residential populations is a recipe for disaster.”

Summing up their report, the panelists observed:

“The pervasive bad odour, the devastated environment and the lengthy list of health complaints of residents made us wonder how they managed to live there. The frustration among the local youth was palpable, leading us to believe that any increase in pollution or continued collusion between Government and polluters could result in a serious law and order situation in Cuddalore.

“Rather than improve the local economy, industries have eroded the self-sufficiency of the region throwing weavers, fisherfolk and farmers out of their traditional livelihoods. Increased health expenditure combined with lower incomes has impoverished the communities, and compromised their ability to exercise healthy choices. There is also a sense of hopelessness at the blatant manner in which companies pollute and regulators and state administration ignores these violations.

“The residents and environment of SIPCOT Cuddalore desperately needs the help of the Government. Like in Bhopal, SIPCOT residents too need clean drinking water, environmental clean-up, long-term medical rehabilitation and livelihood support. The current proposals to set up groundwater intensive polluting industries in Cuddalore will only threaten the long-term economic sustainability of the region.

“We strongly urge the Government to abandon any proposals to set up new polluting industries in Cuddalore. Instead, the Government should look to providing value-adding opportunities to traditional economies such as fisheries, agriculture and weaving. The proposed textile park, PVC factory and oil refinery are certainly not in the interests of local people, and must be given up.”