

World Social Forum

PEOPLE'S FORUM AGAINST COCA-COLA

Report from Mumbai

"We have to build an international alliance to battle the multinationals"

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Mumbai, India: Coca-Cola is in trouble. In a historic march on January 18, 2004, over 500 protesters marched and rallied to condemn Coca-Cola's operations in India. Protesters, including over 150 residents who live in and around Coca-Cola's bottling facilities in India, were joined by a large group of international supporters at the World Social Forum in Mumbai. The events were organized under the banner of People's Forum against Coca-Cola.

The protest drew attention to a pattern that has emerged among Coca-Cola's Indian bottling plants. Three communities in India - Plachimada in Kerala, Wada in Maharashtra and Mehdiaganj in Uttar Pradesh - are experiencing severe water shortages as a result of Coca-Cola's mining of the majority of common groundwater resources around its facilities. And the multinational's indiscriminate dumping of wastewater into the ground has polluted the scarce water that remains. In Sivagangai, Tamil Nadu, residents are opposing a proposed Coca-Cola facility because of fears that they too will face water shortages and pollution.



"Coca-Cola's actions are symbolic of the vulgar arrogance and criminal power of corporations that are looting people of their basic needs, water in this case", said Medha Patkar, coordinator of the National Alliance of People's Movements. "Our right to water, land and forests is at stake and added Ms. Patkar.

The march and rally launched an international campaign to hold Coca-Cola accountable for its actions. Javier Correa, president of SINALTRAINAL, addressed India's Coca-Cola affected communities, declaring that, "Colombians affiliated to SINALTRAINAL will unite with Indian communities' struggle for truth, justice and reparations."

SINALTRAINAL union leaders and organizers of workers at the Colombian Coca-Cola bottling subsidiary have been subject to a gruesome cycle of violence in Colombia. Many have been murdered, kidnapped and tortured by Colombian paramilitary forces.

Tests of Coca-Cola products in the Indian market in September 2003 confirmed the presence of pesticides in the soft drinks, sometimes 30 times higher than those allowed by the European Union standards. The government of India has initiated an inquiry into the findings and the parliament of India has actually banned the sale of Coca-Cola and Pepsico products in the cafeteria.





"This is a classic case of double standards by Coca-Cola," said Amit Srivastava, coordinator of US based Global Resistance. "Coca-Cola thinks that it can get away by abusing communities in India and selling sub-standard products in India. We are ready to bring the battle to the US, to Coca-Cola's home turf," he continued. The international campaign to hold Coca-Cola accountable has planned a series of events in the US to force Coca-Cola to clean up its act.

Sponsors of the People's Forum against Coca-Cola include Coca-Cola Virudha Janakeeya Samara Samithy (Kerala), Joint Action Council Against Sakthi -Coke in Sivagangai (Tamil Nadu), National Alliance of Peoples Movements (India), SINALTRAINAL (Colombia), Colombia Action Network (US), Colombia Demand Justice Campaign (Australia), Chilean Popular and Indigenous Network (Chile), Global Resistance (US), Campaign to Stop Killer Coke/Corporate Campaign, Inc. (US) and Colombia Solidarity Campaign (UK).

For further background information on Coca-Cola, visit www.IndiaResource.org



Photos by Melanie Alfonso of Global Resistance