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Releases

Vigil Sunday in Abbotsford to mark 10th anniversary of tragic, preventable deaths of three farmworkers in van crash

Vancouver - Family, friends and community will gather at a special ceremony Sunday, March 5, in Abbotsford to mark the 10th anniversary of the tragic and preventable deaths of three farmworkers who were killed as they were being transported to work.

Amarjit Kaur Bal, Sukvinder Kaur Puniua, and Sarbjit Kaur Sidhu were passengers in an overcrowded and unsafe van driven by their employer on March 7, 2007. The van crashed on Highway 1 near Abbotsford, killing the three women and injuring more than a dozen fellow workers.

The vigil will take place from 1:30 to 4:00 pm at the Matsqui Centennial Auditorium, 32315 South Fraser Way in Abbotsford. Speakers include Jagjeet Singh Sidhu, husband of Sarbjit Sidhu; the Mayor of Abbotsford, Henry Braun; and Irene Lanzinger, President of the BC Federation of Labour.

The RCMP investigated the accident and recommended criminal charges be laid against the employer. But BC’s Ministry of Justice chose not to proceed. Fines levied against the employer by the Workers’ Compensation Board remain unpaid. Many recommendations of a subsequent Coroner’s inquest that would make transportation of all workers safer are collecting dust because of inaction by the BC Liberal government.

BCFED President Irene Lanzinger says the vigil marking the three deaths is also a call to action to force the provincial government and employers to do more to keep workers safe on the job.

“Worker safety isn’t a priority of the Clark government,” Lanzinger says. “Protections are weak and not always rigorously enforced. Worker safety is being compromised, and employers whose negligence kills or seriously injures workers are let off with a slap on the wrist.”

Included in the program is a candlelight procession to the Golden Tree, a monument created as a legacy to the three women and to honour all farmworkers, the important work they do, and their ongoing struggle for dignity and safe working conditions. Two plays will also be performed following the ceremony—Shaheed Bhagat Singh “Ek Soch” and Upaah—performed by members of Progressive Art Club in Punjabi.