

Dow's Fabric for London Olympics 2012: Is Lord Coe listening?

by Linus Fernandes

In August this year, I published an [article](#) making the case for Dow Chemicals' disassociation from the 2012 London Olympics.

The chemicals giant is sponsoring an eco-friendly wrap over the London Games' main stadium.

However, Dow fail to recognise their liability towards the victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy.

Dow are the owners of Union Carbide, the defendants in the class action suit filed by the Indian government on the behalf of disaster's victims and survivors.

A letter addressed to the Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, has yet to be responded to.

Inertia reigns.

The only progress on the matter, since, is that Amnesty International—the movement to end human right abuses— have addressed an open [letter](#) to Lord Sebastian Coe, the Chairman of the London Organising Committee, demanding an explanation for Dow Jones' association with the 2012 edition of the games.

In the [missive](#), Seema Joshi, Head of Business and Human Rights, writes:

Nearly twenty-seven years after the tragedy, the site has still not been cleaned up, the leak and its impact have not been properly investigated, more than 100,000 people continue to suffer from health problems without the medical care they need. Survivors are still awaiting fair compensation and full redress for their suffering. Despite criminal charges being brought in India against UCC and its Chairman at the time of the disaster, neither of them have responded to summons to appear before the Indian Court. They are still absconding from Indian justice while extradition requests from USA to India remain pending. In 2009, at the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the catastrophe, Amnesty International sponsored a bus tour across Europe in an effort to raise awareness and bring justice to the Bhopal victims. However, injustice continues to prevail as corporate actors continue to refuse to accept responsibility for the disaster and the related cleanup.

Focusing further on LOCOG's commitment to sustainable sourcing, Ms. Joshi says:

Guidelines state that, “[the LOGOC] will place a high priority on environmental, social and ethical issues when procuring products and services for the Games”.

The Code further states that it sets a framework which enables the LOGOC to consider the relevant issues and make informed choices by applying a set of core principles throughout. Amnesty International requests that the LOCOG advise as to the basis on which it has considered that Dow, given the unaddressed legacy of human rights abuses and outstanding concerns relating to legal redress in Bhopal, complies with the requirements of the Code. Please also advise how corporate related human rights abuses are considered as part of the procurement process as this is not evident based on a review of the guidelines. Furthermore, it may have also come to the LOCOG’s attention that the fact that Dow is an official partner of the 2012 Olympic games continues to cause shock and distress among Bhopal survivors as recently reported by the Indian and international press.

The high visibility and legitimacy that its close association with the LOCOG gives Dow is untenable in the face of its continuing failure to address one of the worse corporate related human rights disasters of the 20th century. On the other hand, it risks delegitimizing the long standing calls of Bhopal survivors and other human rights groups for corporate accountability and redress for human rights abuses.

Amnesty International (AI) had earlier [protested](#) Dow’s sponsoring of Live Earth ‘*Run For Water*’ events. These events sought to raise awareness about water scarcity. Ironic, because the groundwater around the Union Carbide plant continues to be polluted and is unfit for human consumption.

Ms. Lorraine Close has organised an [online petition at Change.org](#) for 10,000 signatures seeking Dow Chemicals’ removal from the London Olympics.

Close writes:

I recently spent many months living and working with the people living around the former Union Carbide factory site, some of the poorest people in Bhopal . As a nurse, let me assure you that their medical problems are far from in the past. Those people are my friends, I’ve listened to their stories and seen the pain caused from a lifetime of being poisoned by a company which has already caused so much suffering.

The contamination in Bhopal could be dealt with, were Dow willing to admit responsibility and pay for proper clean up and people in Bhopal could look forward to a more hopeful future.

Can any good come from the above petition? More importantly, can any bad?

Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.

—Benjamin Franklin

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