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London 2012 organizers must not forget Bhopal disaster

Amnesty International has urged London's Olympic organizers not to forget the victims of the Bhopal disaster as they award a lucrative contract for the Games to the Dow Chemical Company.

Dow owns Union Carbide Corporation (UCC), the company that held a majority share in the Indian subsidiary that owned and operated the UCC plant responsible for the 1984 gas leak disaster, which killed thousands of people 27 years ago today.

Dow is due to provide a plastic wrap that will encircle the London 2012 Olympic Stadium during the Games, despite concerns about its human rights record.

"The awarding of this contract to Dow is an insult to the victims of the Bhopal disaster, whose suffering continues till this day," said Seema Joshi, Amnesty International's Head of Business and Human Rights.

Lord Sebastian Coe, chairman of The London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG), last week wrote a letter to Amnesty International dismissing human rights concerns about Dow.

Dow says it has no responsibility for the leak and its consequences, despite the fact UCC became a wholly owned subsidiary of Dow in 2001.

UCC continued to be a separate legal entity but its corporate identity and all of its business is fully integrated with that of Dow.

"For LOCOG to publicly state that Dow has no responsibility for what happened in Bhopal is irresponsible given ongoing legal calls for justice and the fact that it has not consulted interested groups directly," said Seema Joshi.

"We cannot allow corporate actors to turn a blind eye as to what continues to happen in relation to Bhopal."

Corporate interest, legal complexity and government failures and neglect have proved huge obstacles to justice for the people of Bhopal.

Bhopal's massive gas leak in December 1984 killed between 7,000 and 10,000 people in its immediate aftermath, and a further 15,000 over the next 20 years.

More than 100,000 continue to suffer from serious health problems as a result of the leak, while toxic waste at the plant site is yet to be fully cleaned.

UCC continues to defy Indian jurisdiction, failing to abide by repeated summons to appear before a Bhopal court.

"LOCOG should publicly state that ongoing human rights concerns were not considered prior to the contract being given to the Dow Chemical Company and that they made a mistake," she said.