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30 years after the Bhopal disaster, ongoing environmental contamination must be addressed in India: Amnesty International oral statement to the 25th Session of the UN Human Rights Council (3 – 28 March 2014)

10 March 2014

Item 3

Interactive dialogue with the Independent Expert on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment

Mr President, Mr. Knox,

This year will mark the 30th anniversary of the tragedy in Bhopal, India. On 2 December 1984, deadly toxic gas leaked from the former Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, resulting in the deaths of more than 20,000 people.

The disaster has had major long-term and severe inter-generational negative effects on the enjoyment of human rights of the members of the local population. More than 500,000 survivors suffered injury and disability. The health of women has been particularly affected.

The Bhopal disaster is a case study for so far unsuccessful attempts to obtain effective remedies for a gross corporate abuse of human rights.¹

Of particular concern is the ongoing environmental contamination at the Bhopal factory site, which since being abandoned in the wake of the gas leak has remained a source of serious pollution and has never been properly remediated.

¹ Amnesty International has recently published the book "Injustice Incorporated: Corporate Abuses and the Human Right to Remedy."

Contaminated water and soil in the area has harmed the rights to health and access to clean drinking water in the surrounding communities. Many persons not exposed to the gas leak have developed health problems similar to persons who were exposed.

We urge the UN Human Rights Council, its members, observers and Special Procedures to draw attention to the ongoing human rights impacts of the Bhopal disaster. Mr. Knox, we urge you and other Special Procedures to call urgently for concrete steps to be taken to remedy the ongoing environmental contamination.

We call on the Government of India to invite an independent expert body to conduct an authoritative and comprehensive scientific assessment of the extent of environmental contamination at the Bhopal site, so it can develop and implement a detailed remediation plan.

Thirty years into the disaster, ensuring that the site is properly cleaned would be an important step towards finally addressing its enduring legacy and to preventing further harm to the human rights of members of local communities and future generations.

Thank you Mr. President.