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London Live Earth Dow Victoria Park event cancelled at last minute

By Emma Bartholomew
13 April 2010

A massive charity event due to take place in Victoria Park this Sunday (April 18) - where campaigners planned to stage demonstrations against the sponsor, Dow Chemical Company - has been cancelled at the last minute.

Organised by for-profit company Live Earth, Dow Live Earth Run for Water, was to have been a fun-run and live music concert with an unconfirmed "world renowned artist".

It was one of many events taking place in 100 cities across 50 countries on the same day, raising money for water programmes in Africa.

But campaigners had been protesting against Dow's involvement in the environmental event, saying it was an attempt by them to "greenwash" their name.

The chemical company's subsidiary, Union Carbide, leaked toxic gas in 1984 from a pesticide plant in Bhopal in India in a huge environmental disaster.

Estimates vary, but government agencies say 15,000 people died as a result of exposure to the gas, and poisonous chemicals abandoned at the plant continue to leak and pollute the region's groundwater.

A spokeswoman from Tower Hamlets Council, which authorises events in Victoria Park, said Sunday's event was cancelled because it didn't attract enough participants, paying £25 a head, to make it financially viable to stage.

"They had an embargo announcing the artist, and so had a very poor take up," she said.

But the campaign group, International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB), had planned to hijack the day with protests.

Its spokesman Tim Edwards suggested this could be the real reason behind the late cancellation, about which he has mixed feelings.

"The essential aims of the event itself are an expression of something I believe in deeply, which is access to clean water and the issue of water scarcity - and I'm sure the majority of people in the event had the best intentions," he said.

"But I'm glad that Dow's intention to "greenwash" itself and present itself as an ethical, sustainable organisation has failed to work in this instance."

UK poverty and human rights campaign manager, Naomi McAuliffe from Amnesty International, a partner of ICJB said: "We've written to Live Earth, urging them to play a positive role, by asking Dow to publicly commit to cooperating with the forthcoming Indian government clean-up process.

"Yet Live Earth hasn't replied and the association between Live Earth and Dow looks increasingly questionable," she added.

Similar events have been cancelled in Milan and Berlin, and in Sweden the organisers are going ahead with the event, but not under the Live Earth Dow name.

No one from Dow or Live Earth responded to the Gazette, despite numerous attempts to contact them.

Instead of protesting, the ICJB are now having a celebratory picnic on Sunday in Victoria Park from 10am to 1pm.

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