



PRESS RELEASE

Comprehensive Report on Commonwealth Games Launched in Delhi: Panel of Experts Questions Secrecy and Undemocratic Nature of CWG Process

New Delhi, 13 May 2010: Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) launched a report titled, "The 2010 Commonwealth Games: Whose Wealth? Whose Commons?" Former Chief Justice, Delhi High Court, Justice A.P. Shah, officially released the report at an event which was followed by a Panel Discussion chaired by Miloon Kothari, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing. Other panelists consisted of Dr. Amitabh Kundu, Professor of Economics, Jawaharlal Nehru University; Dunu Roy, Director, Hazards Centre; Dr. Shalini Mishra, Senior Researcher, HLRN; and Shivani Chaudhry, Associate Director, Housing and Land Rights Network.

The 2010 Commonwealth Games (CWG) will be held in New Delhi, India, from 3-14 October 2010. Given the many unanswered questions that have marked the CWG process, HLRN undertook a study on various dimensions of the Games. The HLRN study questions the rationale for spending thousands of crores of rupees on a one-time sporting event, which instead of delivering any benefits to the masses is resulting in multiple violations of human rights, especially of the most marginalised sections of society.

The main findings of the report include:

- India's decision to bid for the Commonwealth Games 2010 was non-transparent and undemocratic and cost the country Rs. 137 crore. India offered US \$7.2 million to train athletes of all Commonwealth nations - an offer which allegedly clinched the bid in India's favour.
- The Government of India and Delhi decided to underwrite costs and budget shortfall of the Games, despite the fact that the Ministry of Finance, Department of Expenditure, Government of India, cautioned against it in 2003.
- The budget for the CWG has risen from an initial projection of Rs. 1,899 crore to an official figure of Rs. 10,000 crore and independent expert estimates of Rs. 30,000 crore.
- The expenditure on sports infrastructure is already 2,160% of the initial projected budget.
- The increase in the Union Budget allocation for the CWG from the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports rose by 6,235% from 2005-06 to 2009-10.
- Total expenditure on infrastructure, beautification projects, and security is unknown but likely to be hundreds of crores.
- A July 2009 report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) raised questions on certain financial aspects of the Games, including sponsorships and revenue generation.
- Funds from the 2009-10 Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (Special Component Plan) in Delhi have been diverted to cover CWG related expenditures.
- Over one lakh families have already been evicted due to CWG related projects. 44 more JJ clusters are to be removed before the Games and an estimated 30,000 - 40,000 families will be displaced.
- 'Beggars' and homeless citizens are being arrested and arbitrarily detained under the Bombay Prevention of Beggary Act 1959. The Department of Social Welfare has announced 'no-tolerance zones' in Delhi and plans to send them back to their states of origin.
- There is rampant exploitation of workers at CWG construction sites, including low pay, inadequate living conditions, and lack of safety equipment.
- Experience from around the world has demonstrated that mega sports events result in losses for the host country, especially when security costs are factored in. India's expenses for the CWG are likely to create a negative financial legacy for the nation, the effects of which are already visible in the form of higher cost of living and taxes for Delhi residents.
- The Games are unlikely to improve sports in India since investment is concentrated on stadiums, which lie largely unused after the event, as in the case of the 1982 Asian Games.

The HLRN report concludes that the entire process related to the CWG has been essentially underscored by secrecy, unavailability of information, lack of government accountability, and unconstitutional activities, with evidence of long-term economic, social and environmental costs for the nation, and specifically for the city of Delhi. Preparations for the Games have already resulted in an irreversible alteration in the social, spatial, economic, and environmental dimensions of the city of Delhi. Much of this has taken place in contravention of democratic governance and planning processes.

The goal of portraying Delhi as a 'world class' city and an international sports destination, has led the Indian government - both at the state and central level - to lose sight of its priorities and legal and moral commitments to its people.

Some of the key general recommendations of the report include:

- Need for detailed inquiry into the decision-making and bidding process as well as on the total expenditure of the CWG.
- Need for a full public disclosure of all finances related to the CWG.
- Need for the government to have a long-term legacy plan based on principles of human rights and environmental sustainability.
- Need to investigate those officials who have consistently overstated benefits from the Games, withheld critical information, and misappropriated funds, and prosecute them if they are found guilty.
- Need for a post-games audit and detailed social and environmental impact assessment.
- Need to prevent human rights violations, and for the government to comply with its national and international human rights and environmental legal commitments.
- Need for an investigation into the human rights violations related to the CWG.
- Need to repeal the Bombay Prevention of Beggary Act 1959.

Experts on the panel affirmed the findings of the HLRN report and stressed that the entire process of the CWG, including the resulting human rights violations, are in contravention of India's Constitutional obligations. They also pointed out that the economic and social costs of the CWG could be even worse than stated. The cost of the Games could be as enormous as Rs. 70,000 crore, and the number of families already displaced from their homes due to the Games could be as high as over 100,000 (1 lakh).

The scale of the CWG and the excessive costs involved are hard to justify in a country that has glaringly high levels of poverty, hunger, inequality, homelessness, and malnutrition. When one in three Indians lives below the poverty line and 40% of the world's hungry live in India, when 46% of India's children and 55% of its women are malnourished, does spending thousands of crores of rupees on a 12-day sports event build "national pride" or is it a matter of "national shame"?

The report unequivocally asserts that given India's stark socio-economic reality and the negative social and economic costs already evident in the lead up to the CWG, India should under no circumstances, bid for the Olympic Games or any other mega events.

The HLRN report raises the critical question that if India is really looking for genuine and long-lasting national prestige, would this not come if it spent available resources on providing food, housing, education, sanitation, water, and healthcare for its population instead of on a mega sports event? In light of the country's harsh social reality, is the exercise of hosting the 2010 Commonwealth Games a justified necessity or an unwarranted extravagance?

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