

Oil Rights or Human Rights in Ecuador?



“Our health has been damaged seriously by the contamination caused by Texaco. Many people in our community now have red stains on their skin and others have been vomiting and fainting. Some little children have died because their parents did not know they should not drink the river water.”

Excerpt: AFFIDAVIT OF THE SECOYA TRIBE GIVEN BY ELIAS PIAGUAIE -Aguinda, et al v. Texaco Inc. - Case # 93-CV-7527

- For over four decades, Indigenous communities have witnessed multinational oil companies cut through the delicate Ecuadorian Amazon jungle and their ancestral lands in search of the country's vast petroleum resources.
- Texaco, which merged with Chevron in 2001, began prospecting for oil in Ecuador in 1964, becoming the first company to discover commercial quantities of oil in the country. Texaco set the standards for oil operations in the region and remained the operating partner through its joint venture with the state-owned oil company.
- According to the 1991 report "Amazon Crude" by the environmental lawyer Judith Kimerling, from 1972 until it left Ecuador in 1992, **Texaco intentionally dumped more than 19 billion gallons of toxic wastewaters into the region and was responsible for 16.8 million gallons of crude oil spilling from the main pipeline into the forest.** By comparison, the infamous *Exxon Valdez* tanker disaster in 1989 spilled 10.8 million gallons of crude off the coast of Alaska. The report alleges that these actions contaminated both the soil and the groundwater of the communities in the area and will continue to threaten the economic and cultural bases of Indigenous peoples' survival.
- Health reports published in renowned medical journals point out the relationship between **higher cancer rates** and living in the proximity of oil fields, and between **spontaneous miscarriage rates** and living in the proximity of contaminated water streams. In some streams, the levels of oil chemicals like hydrocarbon concentrations were as high as 280 times the permitted levels in the European Community.
- Meanwhile, ChevronTexaco has not only refused to acknowledge any link between the public health hazards and the environmental problems caused by its drilling policies in the Ecuadorian Amazon, but has also refused to clean up the pollution, claiming that a controversial ‘clean up’ agreement with the Ecuadorian Government has released it of any further liability. The company has further denied direct compensation to the affected communities for threatening their health and their economic and cultural survival by polluting their environment. The Amazon residents have been fighting this problem in courts since 1993.
- Amnesty International USA, along with other socially responsible investors, has co-filed on a shareholder resolution submitted to the Board of Director of ChevronTexaco, asking them to address the situation in Ecuador and is calling on its members to campaign in support of this resolution. **This resolution will be voted on between March 27 and April 27 2005.**
- To learn more about this issue go to: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/business/ecuador.html>
- To join Amnesty’s campaign to demand accountability from ChevronTexaco, contact the Corporate Action Network at corpaction@aiusa.org.