

Increased Oil Development Rejected in the Amazon

Indigenous people throughout the Amazon are increasingly discovering oil extraction to be one of the greatest threats to their land, health and culture. In Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru, central governments are pushing increased oil and gas development as a solution to their economic problems.



photo courtesy of RAN

Maxus oil company constructs new pipeline into the forests of the Ecuadorian Oriente

ECUADOR:

Indigenous Federations Take Strong Stand Against Seventh Round of Oil Leasing

On January 24, Ecuador's president formally opened a new round of oil leases, which will open five million acres of the rainforest (an area the size of New Jersey) to international oil companies. Included in the lands affected are the territories of the Huaorani, Quichua, Cofán, Shuar and Ashuar peoples, the planned Sumaco and Galeras National Parks,

and vast areas of flooded forests and rainforest.

That same day, Ecuadorian Indigenous peoples and environmentalists responded with a peaceful takeover of the Ministry of Energy and Mines. As a result, Minister Francisco Acosta agreed to a meeting with the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE, opening the way

for discussions on the formation of a commission to design and implement oil monitoring policies.

In March, CONAIE and the Amazon regional Indigenous organization, CONFENAIE both issued strong statements notifying the Ecuadorian government and transnational oil companies that the Indigenous peoples in Ecuador would not allow the new round

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of licensing to proceed.

In an open letter to the Ecuadorian president, Edmundo Vargas President of CONFENAIE declared, "The Ecuadorian government's lack of sensitivity regarding the position of the Indigenous peoples and environmentalists of the region; the lack of a serious natural resource management policy which addresses the present and future needs of our country and particularly those of the Indigenous nationalities of the region; the absence of adequate laws to control national and foreign companies; the carrying out of economic projects within Indigenous territories by the government and private companies without prior consultation; and the lack of indigenous participation in the decisions and benefits of these projects, clearly demonstrate that the conditions and guarantees necessary to extend the scope of petroleum activities in the Ecuadorian Amazon do not exist."

CONAIE supported this position adding, that they hold, "the Ecuadorian State and petroleum companies participating in the Seventh Oil Licensing Round responsible for the problems we have and for damages both to those people who have lived in the Amazon for thousands of years and to their environment."

Indigenous groups point out that the drilling areas up for relicensing are located in the headwaters of the Amazonian river system on the Eastern slope of the Andes. Therefore any spills and toxic dumping--which have been ubiquitous companions of previous oil activities in Ecuador--could potentially affect the entire Amazon region through its waterways.

Both organizations called for a fifteen year moratorium for the seventh

round of licensing, "during which time the country can evaluate the environmental and social impacts of oil development, and Ecuador can implant policies for oil development which include defense of the environment, respect for the ways of life of Indigenous peoples, and an integrated orientation of the country which will benefit all Ecuadorians."

Vargas stated, "The Directive Council of CONFENAIE, together with its member federations, has resolved that

the 150,000 Indigenous people who make up the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon cannot guarantee, neither to the Ecuadorian State, nor to national or foreign investors participating in the Seventh Oil Licensing Round, that oil exploration or exploitation projects in our territories will be able to proceed. ♡

Information supplied by CONAIE, CONFENAIE and the Rainforest Action Network."

Case against Texaco may be heard in New York Courts

In April, Federal Judge Vincent L. Broderick ruled that if Indigenous people and others suing Texaco for irresponsibly discarding hazardous waste in the Ecuadorian rainforest can prove that decisions regarding these operations were made at Texaco headquarters in New York, then it would be appropriate for the case to be heard by the US federal court in New York. The case was brought by Siona, Secoya, Cofán, and Quichua peoples and mestizo colonists who live in the zone affected by Texaco's operations.

Texaco's lawyers have asked the judge to reconsider. If the case proceeds in New York court, it will set an important precedent regarding rights of foreigners to bring US based multinationals to trial within the US.

Pastaza Organizations negotiate with ARCO

Under pressure from the Organi-

zation of Indigenous People of Pastaza (OPIP) and support organizations, the transnational oil company ARCO agreed to negotiate their plans for oil exploration in the province of Pastaza in Ecuador's Oriente. OPIP met with ARCO on June 9. A second meeting should be occurring in Ecuador as this magazine goes to press. ARCO officially states that it has not yet made the decision to pursue exploration in the Oriente's "Block 10", it has nevertheless, reached several preliminary agreements with OPIP. OPIP and ARCO agreed to establish a technical commission which will include three representatives from ARCO and from Petroecuador and six from Indigenous organizations in the region. This commission will establish the guidelines for an Evaluation of Environmental Impact for the Exploratory Period, as well as select which company will complete the study.