



**Amazon In Focus** FALL 2015



AMAZON WATCH

## OUR MISSION & VISION

### Our Mission

Amazon Watch is a nonprofit organization founded in 1996 to protect the rainforest and advance the rights of indigenous peoples in the Amazon Basin. We partner with indigenous and environmental organizations in campaigns for human rights, corporate accountability and the preservation of the Amazon's ecological systems.

### Our Vision

We envision a world that honors and values cultural and biological diversity and the critical contribution of tropical rainforests to our planet's life support system. We believe that indigenous self-determination is paramount, and see that indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contribute greatly to sustainable and equitable stewardship of the Earth. We strive for a world in which governments, corporations and civil society respect the collective rights of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent over any activity affecting their territories and resources. We commit, in the spirit of partnership and mutual respect, to support our indigenous allies in their efforts to protect life, land, and culture in accordance with their aspirations and needs.

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## MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friends of the Amazon:

Since first traveling to the Amazon in 1995, I have dedicated my life's work to defending our forests. Today, I am honored and inspired to lead Amazon Watch during this critical time for the Amazon, indigenous peoples' rights and our global climate.

For nearly two decades Amazon Watch has worked tirelessly with indigenous, frontline communities and NGO allies to stop destructive projects, hold governments and corporations accountable, and promote respect for indigenous rights. Sadly, destruction for short-term economic gain continues to disintegrate the integrity of this magnificent ecosystem known as the heart of Mother Earth.

We are at a critical moment for defending the Amazon and our global climate—our actions now will determine the planet we leave for our children. We must do what is right and take bold action! While there are many methods for stopping the destruction of the Amazon, science has proven that our strategy of supporting indigenous rights is one of the most effective ways to protect this precious region.

That's why Amazon Watch supports indigenous-led initiatives to protect more than 60 million acres of biologically and culturally significant rainforests from oil development, mega-dams and other threats. We also support the voices of women and youth, visions of the elders, warnings from global scientists, and calls from our NGO and frontline community allies such as the Pope, to keep fossil fuels in the ground from the Amazon to the Arctic. We are calling for 100% truly clean and renewable global energy, rather than fossil fuels, mega-dams and other false solutions.

As a woman and mother of two girls, I am deeply concerned about their future as well as the planet they will inherit. It gives me great hope, however, to take part in the collective, growing power of women leaders who are standing up for our children and Mother Earth.

Please join me, Amazon Watch and our allies in bringing our work and demands to global leaders before and after COP 21 in Paris. I invite you to share your visions and ideas, to partner with us, and to invest in our work.

We can't do this without *your* support. Thank you! Gracias! Muito Obrigada!

For the Amazon and Future Generations,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leila S. Salazar".

Leila Salazar-López  
Executive Director



Photo: Caroline Bennett/Amazon Watch

## OUR WORK

*From the Tropical Andes to the heart of the Brazilian Amazon, Amazon Watch works in close long term partnerships with indigenous peoples to protect culturally and biologically diverse rainforests from mega-industrial development projects that destroy the environment and threaten our global climate. Our work is primarily focused on the Amazon rainforests of Peru, Ecuador, Brazil and the cloud forests in northeastern Colombia. Our overarching goals are:*

- 1. Foster widespread understanding of the intrinsic value of indigenous peoples' stewardship and the global significance of the Amazon rainforest.*
- 2. Increase the capacity of indigenous peoples to advance their rights, to legalize their territories and to challenge extractive industry's entry into indigenous lands.*
- 3. Challenge industrial expansion into ecological and culturally sensitive areas.*
- 4. Champion alternatives and solutions to unsustainable industrial development.*
- 5. Hold corporations accountable for past harms and seek cleanup and reparation for damages.*

# 2015 PROGRAMMATIC PRIORITIES

The Amazon, the world's largest and most biodiverse tropical rainforest, covers an area larger than the continental United States, houses one-third of the Earth's plant and animal species, and helps regulate our global climate. Nearly 400 distinct indigenous peoples depend on the Amazon rainforest for their physical and cultural survival. The Amazon and its peoples are under threat from unsustainable mega-projects (dams, drilling, pipelines, roads) that, if built, will accelerate deforestation, displacement of indigenous peoples, and climate change. The next several years will be critical to advancing rainforest protection, indigenous rights, and solutions to climate change such as clean renewable energy.

## 1. Advance Protection of the Sacred Headwaters of the Amazon.

The Sacred Headwaters of the Amazon encompasses the rainforest and wetland ecosystems of the Napo and Marañón river basins in Ecuador and Peru. This region hosts extremely high levels of biodiversity and endemism. In fact, it has the highest concentration of plant, bird, mammal, and amphibian species in the Amazon. The majority of the region's rainforests are also the ancestral territories of numerous indigenous peoples. The governments of Ecuador and Peru are aggressively promoting oil development in the Sacred Headwaters region. Amazon Watch is mobilizing international support for indigenous-led initiatives to protect more than 60 million acres of biologically and culturally significant rainforests from oil development in Ecuador and Peru.

## 2. Keep Fossil Fuels in the Ground in the Amazon.

To avoid a more than 2°C rise in global temperature, at least two-thirds of proven fossil fuel reserves must remain in the ground. In 2015, Amazon Watch will work with researchers

to map fossil fuel reserves in the Amazon that overlap with biodiversity hot-spots and indigenous territories, profile the most destructive oil companies in the Amazon, and lead a global campaign with indigenous and NGO allies to keep fossil fuels in the ground in the Amazon. We also continue to campaign to hold Chevron Texaco accountable for environmental destruction caused by oil extraction.

## 3. Support Indigenous Voices on Climate Change and Rights-Based Climate Solutions.

Recent studies confirm that indigenous rights are key to protecting tropical rainforests, which absorb nearly 20% of global carbon dioxide emissions. We will advocate for rights-based solutions to deforestation and climate change at international fora, including the UN climate summit in Paris in December 2015 (COP21).

## 4. Stop Future Mega-Dams in the Brazilian Amazon and Promote Clean Energy.

The Tapajós River is the last major tributary in the Brazilian Amazon that still runs free. Today, the Tapajós and its vast forests are at risk of destruction from plans to build 29 large dams and approximately 80 smaller dams across its tributaries. We are supporting the indigenous peoples who are challenging these new dams on the Tapajós River while promoting clean energy solutions, such as wind, solar, and energy efficiency.

"If we want to defend our global climate, we must defend the Amazon. If we want to defend the Amazon, we must support indigenous rights and territories."

— Leila Salazar-López, Amazon Watch

## FEATURE: KEEP IT IN THE GROUND

By Kevin Koenig

In the remote cloud forest of northeastern Colombia, the elders of the indigenous U'wa were hard at work. Threatened by Occidental Petroleum's (Oxy) plans to drill in their sacred territory, there was one obvious solution—hide the oil.

For months, shrouded in clouds, warmed by fire, and fueled by song and coca leaves, they 'worked' in the spirit world to move the underground oil reserves away from Oxy's exploratory wells.

Despite extensive geologic data that showed massive amounts of crude underneath U'wa land, Oxy never found the oil. The company drilled four wells.

The U'wa cosmivision tells of a great imbalance in the world if resource extraction continues unabated. Their vision doesn't simply refer to the contamination fossil fuel extraction brings, but rather a profound shift in the interconnectedness of our ecosystem necessary for sustaining life on earth.

Indigenous peoples have long warned of the perils of resource extraction. But as Patricia Gualinga of the Kichwa community of Sarayaku in Ecuador explains, "it's only now that scientists are confirming what our medicine people have been saying for millennia."



Photo: Caroline Bennett/Amazon Watch

That science is unequivocal—fossil fuels must stay in the ground. In fact, roughly two-thirds of all proven reserves need to remain permanently in the ground to avoid the two-degree Celsius rise in temperature that will create catastrophic climate chaos.

Why then, are companies scouring the Arctic circle, the Dakota plains, and remote Amazonian rainforest looking for unburnable oil that can't be used if we hope to keep the planet habitable?

Who gets to extract their oil and who must keep theirs in the ground? Among the world's leading emitters of greenhouse gases—those who bear the historic responsibility for climate change are known as Annex One countries—climate promises are belied by energy policies that continue to open new areas for drilling, totally divorced from climate safe policy.

Does the developing world have a 'right' to follow in the polluting footsteps of Annex One countries? Or can they leap-frog to the new era of renewable energy sovereignty which will also remove their economies from the boom and bust cycle of commodity dependence?

One path, outlined by *Nature*, argues that the market will dictate which oil, gas, and coal gets used first, and that the biggest reserves should remain in the ground. But that ignores other factors equally important to meeting our collective carbon budget, including critical criteria such as biodiversity and human rights.

What becomes of places like the Amazon Basin that don't have major oil reserves, but are vital for the regulation of the earth's climate, house 20% of the planet's fresh water, and one in ten of the world's known species?

In the debate over where to keep oil in the ground, the Amazon is a critical place to start. Millions of years ago, before the uplift of the Andes, the Amazon river flowed west and emptied into the Pacific Ocean, depositing detritus and microorganisms along the way that became oil deposits throughout what is now the western shield of the Amazon in modern day Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Places like Ecuador's Amazon, characterized by mountainous microclimates, never fully froze during the Pleistocene age, and hence today have some of the highest rates of biodiversity and endemic species in the world.

Oil extraction in regions like the sacred headwaters of the Amazon is a triple threat for the climate. Besides the actual CO2 emissions from burning crude, oil extraction and its related infrastructure is a major driver of deforestation. Forests are cleared for roads and pipelines, opening new

access arteries for agro-industrial activity and colonization. Additionally, emissions from fallen forests are a major contributor to greenhouse gases. Lastly, with tree loss we lose the forest's natural ability to absorb CO2 exactly when we need it most.

It is hard to untangle our fossil fuel dependence from capitalism, and as Naomi Klein has so eloquently argued, we need to deal with one in order to deal with the other. We can't have an unlimited infinite economic system based on finite natural resources.

What's the solution? We must move past trying to mitigate our way to climate sustainability by regulating emissions from the tailpipe or smokestack. We need a supply side strategy that starts at the wellhead. The discussion cannot be solely about emissions. Indigenous rights, human rights, rights of nature and biodiversity must be taken into account when prioritizing criteria for keeping fossil fuels in the ground.

There is no road map to solving perhaps the hardest and most important question of our time. But leading up to the COP21 climate summit in Paris, we are advocating important ideas from our partners like Annex Zero—a UNFCCC sponsored category for communities and countries to go entirely carbon free. And *Sumak Kawsay*, or living forest, a concept which Sarayaku proposes that creates a new category for community protected forests recognizing the relationship between plants, animals, and spirits.

The U'wa *werjayas* can't hide all the fossil fuels in the world. Now it's time to follow in their footsteps and protect our home planet together.

# The New York Times

## Pope Francis, in Ecuador, Calls for More Protection of Rain Forest and Its People

By Jim Yardley

QUITO, Ecuador — Pope Francis on Tuesday called for increased protection of the Amazon rain forest and the indigenous people who live there, declaring that Ecuador must resist exploiting natural riches for “short-term benefits,” an implicit rebuke of the policies of President Rafael Correa.

In his final stops of a busy day, Francis made environmental protection a central theme, invoking the biblical tenet for humans to be guardians of creation, while praising the way of life of indigenous peoples living in the rain forests. Several indigenous leaders attending Francis’ final event of the day have been fighting the policies of Mr. Correa to expand oil exploration in the Ecuadorean Amazon.

“The tapping of natural resources, which are so abundant in Ecuador, must not be concerned with short-term benefits,” Francis told a group of civil society leaders at his final stop of the day. “As stewards of these riches which we have received, we have an obligation toward society as a whole, and toward future generations.”

Francis had been expected to address the exploitation of the Amazon, after specifically including the issue in “Laudato Si’,” the environmental encyclical he released to worldwide attention last month. In the document, Francis warned against the perils of climate change but also highlighted the link between environmental destruction and the plight of the poor, including indigenous groups in South America.

Beginning his Latin American tour in Ecuador meant the issue would inevitably arise, and would present political complications, since Mr. Correa is expanding oil production in the Amazon. After weeks of middle-class protests against his proposals to redistribute wealth, Mr. Correa has unabashedly sought to be seen in public with the popular pope.



Pope Francis, center, arrived Tuesday to celebrate Mass at Bicentenario Park in Quito, Ecuador.  
Alessandro Bianchi/Reuters

Environmentalists in Ecuador have embraced the pope’s encyclical, yet Francis has bruised some feelings. Leaders of one association of indigenous peoples have complained that Francis declined a request to meet with them privately about their efforts to fight oil production. And it was too soon to know if the pope’s message — which did not include a direct mention of oil exploration — would have an influence on Mr. Correa.

Ecuador’s government depends on oil royalties for revenues, and Mr. Correa has granted approvals for a major expansion of oil exploration in the Ecuadorean Amazon, including in Yasuní National Park, considered one of the richest sources of biodiversity in the world. In 2007, Mr. Correa proposed leaving oil in the ground if other governments would contribute \$3.6 billion to a global trust fund intended to protect 4,000 square miles of pristine rain forest.

But when the government contributions did not arrive, Mr. Correa reversed himself. Two years ago, he ended the moratorium on new exploration and set in motion an approvals process that has cleared the way for new oil production to begin next year.

Oil pollution in Ecuadorean jungles has brought two decades of litigation. Among the civil society activists who attended Francis's last meeting on Tuesday were leaders of seven different indigenous groups living inside Yasuní National Park. (Two other nomadic indigenous groups inside the Yasuní live removed from any contact with civilization.)

Last weekend, activists also published an online open letter to the pope, seeking his direct intervention in protecting the jungle homeland of Ecuador's indigenous people. Franco Viteri, one of the activists, planned to present the letter to the pope on Tuesday.

"We ask you to intercede and call upon the Ecuadorean government to not expand the oil frontier and mega-mining in indigenous territories, especially in Yasuní," the letter concluded. "We ask you to call upon them to respect the constitution and international treaties and agreements on the environment and human rights."

Kevin Koenig, Ecuador program coordinator of the nonprofit group Amazon Watch, said Francis' encyclical had heartened environmentalists and indigenous leaders in Ecuador, who fear that Mr. Correa's expansion plans could be devastating.

"President Correa's environmental policies are at odds with the message of the pope's encyclical," said Mr. Koenig, whose group works with indigenous peoples to protect the Amazon. He said oil exploration was "the major indigenous rights environmental battle in the Amazon right now."

In his remarks on Tuesday, Francis cited his own encyclical, stating that the Amazon required "greater protection because of its immense importance for the global ecosystem." He also cited his principle of integral ecology, a balance of economic development and environmental protection, and returned to that theme in his remarks on Tuesday.

"Ecuador — together with other countries bordering the Amazon — has an opportunity to become a teacher of integral ecology," he said. "We received this world as an inheritance from past generations, but also as a loan from future generations, to whom we will have to return it."

*William Neuman and Carolina Loza contributed reporting.*

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## **THE FILTHY FIVE: TOP OIL COMPANIES THREATENING THE AMAZON**

By Adam Zuckerman

Earlier this year Amazon Watch released “The Slimy Seventeen,” profiles of seventeen oil and gas companies causing catastrophic damage to the Amazon rainforest and threatening the indigenous communities that call it home. This list was inspired by a call from indigenous leaders to keep the oil in the ground.

From Colombia to Ecuador and Peru, Amazon Watch named and shamed those companies, and now we’ve narrowed down the list to the top corporations threatening the indigenous peoples Amazon Watch has fought alongside for decades. Here are the Filthy Five, a group of oil companies negatively impacting the Amazon today. To take direct action, check out the Activist Toolkit on our website.

### **Ecopetrol (EC)**

In February, the U’wa people won an historic victory over Colombia’s Ecopetrol, which has a long history of violating the U’wa’s territorial rights. Ecopetrol, which operates the Magallenes gas exploration project, attempted to militarize the area after the U’wa forbade workers from entering their territory in 2014. Following a 40-day stand-off, Ecopetrol suspended the project. With further pressure from the U’wa—supported by national and international partners like Amazon Watch—the company dismantled it. We join the U’wa in calling on Ecopetrol to definitively cancel the Magallenes gas project.

### **Andes Petroleum (SNP & PTR)**

Andes Petroleum, which is wholly owned by Chinese state oil companies Sinopec and CNPC (publicly traded as Petrochina), is attempting to drill one of the most biodiverse

and culturally fragile parts of the Ecuadorian Amazon. The area is home to the Sápara and the Kichwa of Sarayaku, two peoples who, for decades, have defended their territory from oil operations. Both communities have released numerous declarations opposing Andes’ proposed operations, including one that Amazon Watch amplified in an action that sent over ten thousand emails to Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang. While Andes is reportedly freezing plans to drill through 2015, we need to pressure them to cancel such plans indefinitely.

### **PetroAmazonas /PetroEcuador**

Ecuadorian state oil company PetroEcuador, which in some areas operates under the name PetroAmazonas, is a major environmental and human rights offender. The company operates most of Ecuador’s oil fields, and Ecuador reports an oil spill nearly every week. Petroamazonas recently built an illegal road into the heart of Yasuní National Park, where indigenous communities live in voluntary isolation. It is now trying to secure financing from China to operate in the most biodiverse and culturally fragile part of the park, Yasuní-ITT. China should refuse to fund such a devastating project and PetroAmazonas should cancel its plans to drill in Yasuní National Park.



Photo: Caroline Bennett/Amazon Watch



Photo: Caroline Bennett/Amazon Watch

## **Geopark (GPRK)**

Geopark has interest in oil and gas projects that cover four million acres of South America. In October 2014, it became the operator of Block 64, a controversial oil block in the heart of Achuar territory in the Peruvian Amazon. Over the years, Achuar opposition has forced Occidental, Arco, and Talisman to all leave the region. Geopark should respect the will of the Achuar and refrain from exploring in the majority of the block where they will face resistance.

## **Pluspetrol**

Pluspetrol's license for Peru's Block 192 (formerly Block 1-AB) expired in August, but the Argentinian company is leaving behind a legacy of contamination. According to Peru's Health Ministry, 98% of children in the affected indigenous communities have inadmissibly high levels of toxic metals in their blood. Even the country's industry-friendly Environment Ministry declared four river basins impacted by Pluspetrol's operations "environmental emergencies." We call upon Pluspetrol to fully remediate its contamination in Block 192.



Photo: Caroline Bennett/Amazon Watch

## **HOW THEY WON:** WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE U'WA AND ACHUAR VICTORIES IN 2015

By Andrew Miller

In 2015, several indigenous peoples announced important advances in their decades-long struggles to defend their sacred homelands. The Achuar people of the Northern Peruvian Amazon and the U'wa people of the Colombian cloud forest both embody the power of grassroots resistance in the face of multi-billion dollar corporations.

In March, the Achuar announced a settlement against Occidental Petroleum (Oxy) for deadly damage caused by decades of oil pollution. Additionally, the U'wa – taking a preventive approach – stopped a new gas project in its tracks, forcing Ecopetrol to dismantle an exploratory platform constructed within U'wa ancestral territory.

How did they both do it? These battles were hard-fought and part of a long-term process of resistance that dates back decades. Here we examine strategies and tactics that worked for both the Achuar and U'wa, who consider their battles as part of one integral effort.

**Base campaigns on indigeneity:** The U'wa people root their actions in natural law, which long predates (and trumps) the laws of men. For them, extracting oil, or the “blood of Mother Earth,” generates a cosmic imbalance, provoking drastic environmental repercussions for mankind. The spirit *Sira* designated the U'wa people as the guardians of the planet. This indigenous cosmivision has both guided the U'wa themselves and inspired world-wide solidarity.

**Internationalize the campaign:** When confronting a multi-national oil corporation, it is crucial to go global. Following in the U'wa's footsteps, the Achuar brought their campaign to Oxy's doorstep in Los Angeles. Along with support from Peruvian organizations, they partnered with groups like Amazon Watch and EarthRights International to ensure their voices resonated far beyond the borders of Peru.

**Mobilize on the ground:** Grassroots mobilization to protest megaprojects can be a powerful, albeit risky strategy. Stopping major economic activity like oil extraction gives the communities leverage. However, governments may respond with violent repression. During such mobilizations—as with the 40-day U'wa sit-in along the Caño Limón pipeline—external solidarity and media coverage can make the difference between a violent eviction or peaceful negotiations.

**Attack the corporate image:** Corporations spend billions on public relations and advertising. Exposing the company's problematic practices in the media can be an effective way of underscoring the corporation's “reputational risks” posed by a drawn-out battle with indigenous peoples. The U'wa are masters of the art of media relations, in part because they are crystal clear in their determination and position.



Photo: Amazon Watch / Spectral Q

**Launch a lawsuit:** National and international legal action remains an important tool within indigenous peoples' modern toolbox. Lawsuits aren't appropriate in all cases – they require a lot of time and money and don't guarantee success. But the successful Achuar case against Oxy demonstrates that legal action remains an important option in the face of corporate arrogance and intransigence.

Confronting the largest corporations on the planet is an asymmetrical battle. The companies have unimaginable financial, legal, and public relations resources at their disposal. But indigenous peoples have other resources: deep spiritual power, intrinsic legitimacy within their homelands, a strengthening international rights framework, and global grassroots solidarity.

There is no magical formula for winning corporate campaigns. But it is important to look at concrete examples of indigenous Davids confronting corporate Goliaths. Let's recognize the leadership of the Achuar and the U'wa, learn what we can from them, and apply their wisdom to future battles.

# INDIGENOUS VOICES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Words & pictures by Caroline Bennett



The earth's climate is changing in ways that have profound global impacts on its lands, waters and peoples. Our success in building resilience as a species depends on how well we understand, predict and adapt to a fundamentally different planet than the one we have inhabited for centuries. Scientific and academic communities have made significant advances in understanding the behavior and dynamics of Earth's systems, but a very important voice has largely been missing from the conversation about climate change. ***What could the world and Western science learn from indigenous knowledge and practices?***

As the Western world sluggishly awakes to the veracity of climate change, indigenous peoples have long been observing its effects on the natural environment that sustains their very existence. Although they bear the least responsibility

for greenhouse gas emissions, they are often the ones most disproportionately affected. There is growing evidence that the livelihoods, cultural practices and very existence of some 370 million indigenous peoples worldwide are already under threat from both the impacts of climate change and from international programs that attempt to mitigate them. Despite living traditional lifestyles with small carbon footprints, indigenous peoples often blame themselves for the changes they observe around them. Moved by deep ancestral connections with the natural environment, they may make great sacrifices that, in their worldview, are critical efforts to restore the balance between nature and humans. What does it mean to pass on to your children culpability and guilt associated with the drying of an Amazon tributary that represents life for future generations? Or to watch as your culture is washed away by changes in the flows of the very waterways that created and nourished it?



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If we remove the oil from underground it affects the plants above the ground, the mountain, river, the sky...it affects you and it affects me. All that comes from the earth is related to oil—the spirit of nature in its diverse forms of expression are what must guide our struggle. It is difficult to supersede vanity, egoism translated in public policy, but if we want to change the planet and work together as human beings, this is what we must change. If we don't, then our speeches, struggles and decisions are in vain.”

—  
Manari Ushigua Santi, Sápara spiritual leader

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The Sápara owe their existence in no small part to the fact that theirs was, until recently, one of the last sectors of the Ecuadorian Amazon free from oil concessions. They are working hard to preserve their ancestral knowledge and way of life. Everything they need to survive comes from the forest. They are experts in maintaining and protecting the environment in a sustainable way, as they have for millennia.



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If the mountains, lakes and rivers are destroyed, and if the red dynamite explodes, there will be epidemics, the earth will be destroyed and will convert to dust.

—  
Sabino Gualinga, Yachak of Sarayaku

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Our indigenous communities, in which we are caretakers of the forests, are already feeling the impacts of climate change,” say the Kichwa people of Sarayaku. “Our elder wisdom-keepers have been warning us for many years, they knew about this but weren’t listened to. They said there would be problems if we continued preying on Mother Nature, causing impacts so great they won’t only affect nature, but also humankind. We are out of time. Now is the moment for us to be responsible and bet on life since the continuity of our existence on this planet depends on it.

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My grandfather said long ago that the uncontrolled action of man has created imbalance in nature. Fish are dying because the rivers are drying up. The cycle of rainfall is not the same, which affects the plants and animals. This saddens me because my grandfather told me that he was part of the land, part of the river, part of the forest. For me, caring for nature is caring for my ancestors.

—

Mayalú Kokometi Waura Txucarramãe,  
Kayapó youth activist

”



Mayalú and the indigenous people of the Amazon are already facing the harsh consequences of climate change. They have been monitoring its effects for years, their observations coded in ritual and tradition while their insight and wisdom is often lost to outsiders. Today they tell stories of drastically changing weather patterns and agricultural cycles. Temperatures are rising. Fires burn more intensely in dry forests. Rivers flood unpredictably and rainfall patterns do not follow traditional methods of forecast such as celestial timing. How can the Kayapó continue to predict rains in order to time crops when looking to the stars of Pleiades no longer helps predict weather patterns as it did for centuries?

***What role should ancient wisdom play in confronting our biggest modern challenge?***



Photo: Jessica Yurasek / Amazon Watch

## THE CHEVRON TAPES

### SMOKING GUN EXPOSES OIL GIANT

By Paul Paz y Miño

Internal Chevron videos of secret pre-inspections of well sites made in 2005 during the Ecuador pollution trial were released by an internal whistleblower this year and became publicly known as “The Chevron Tapes.” The footage shows company technicians finding and mocking extensive oil contamination in areas of the Amazon rainforest that the oil giant claimed in various courts had been remediated.

A Chevron whistleblower sent dozens of internal company videos to Amazon Watch with a note signed “A Friend from Chevron.” Most of the videos show Chevron employees and consultants secretly visiting the company’s former well sites in Ecuador to find “clean” spots where they could take soil and water

samples at later site inspections when the presiding trial judge would be in attendance. In 2015, Amazon Watch released the leaked videos in conjunction with *Vice News* after a federal judge refused to allow them as evidence in Chevron's retaliatory RICO suit against the Ecuadorians and their lawyers. The videos have been seen over 2.3 million times causing Chevron to predictably retaliate against Amazon Watch with renewed vigor for "blowing the lid" off their only defense.

The epic legal battle to hold Chevron accountable for the 18 billion gallons of toxic drilling waters deliberately dumped into the Ecuadorian Amazon continues as the indigenous plaintiffs still seek to collect payment of the \$9.5 billion verdict. Despite admitting to the dumping and being found liable after over 100 scientific reports—many conducted by Chevron's own teams—the company continues to refuse to accept responsibility for the contamination. Clinging to a feeble defense that Texaco was only one member of a consortium despite being the sole operator, Chevron claimed it was only responsible for cleaning a minor portion of the remaining 900+ waste pits. Yet these "smoking gun" videos prove once again that even the waste pits Chevron accepts responsibility for are still toxic. What's worse? The videos prove that Chevron knew about the contamination ten years ago and continued to deny reality as more Ecuadorians became sick and died. Texaco's crime was creating the pollution, but Chevron's crime has been covering it up and blaming its victims.

While Chevron has failed miserably at hiding its guilt in Ecuador, it has succeeded in suppressing the story at



Photo: Jessica Yurasek / Amazon Watch

home in the U.S. At Chevron's last shareholder meeting, when confronted by Humberto Piaguaje, Amazon Watch, and a host of other shareholder allies, Chevron still alleged to be the "victim of a shakedown" and continued to lie to their own shareholders with a false narrative of fraud and extortion. They have committed multiple acts of slander against Amazon Watch, spreading outright falsehoods to media in hopes of harming our fundraising efforts.

Amazon Watch's release of "The Chevron Tapes" is an example of how successful Chevron's attacks have been in diminishing the effectiveness of corporate accountability advocates. While the videos were widely seen by many online and the *Vice News* story brought exposure, these revelations did not get mainstream

media coverage for two reasons. First, in the U.S., the story is overshadowed by Chevron's concocted false narrative of a bribery scheme. Second, Chevron's legal retaliatory attacks in the U.S. have intimidated news outlets from covering the true story.

We know this because one major network reporter told Amazon Watch off the record that they saw Chevron's behind the scenes pressure as a smear campaign against us and expressed frustration at not being able to cover the story due to purported legal concerns from upper management. This is part of our new responsibility in the epic battle for accountability—to keep Chevron from burying the truth and rewriting history. Much to Chevron's dismay, we are certain that "The Chevron Tapes" will follow the company to Canada and anywhere else the Ecuadorians go to enforce the rightfully won \$9.5 verdict against Chevron.



Photo: Maira Irigaray/Amazon Watch

## **THE UNSEEN TRUTH: MEGA-DAMS & HUMAN RIGHTS**

By Maira Irigaray

Every day you turn on at least one light. Have you ever stopped to think about where this energy comes from and how it gets there? As society moves away from fossil fuels and towards a renewable energy future, there remain some common misperceptions about clean energy.

In Brazil, for example, over 70% of energy comes from hydropower created by mega-dams. Yet contrary to common belief, hydropower is not clean and cheap energy. Propaganda created by hydropower promoters might lead you to mistakenly believe that mega-dams provide “clean energy,” yet dams are in fact the start of greater ecosystem collapse, unleashing forces responsible for the devastation of forests, fisheries, biodiversity, global climate change and human rights abuses.

Mega-dams such as Belo Monte on the Xingu river in the Brazilian Amazon are much more than just an energy source. For indigenous peoples, mega-dams can mean cultural ethnocide. Additionally, mega-dams mean forced displacement, a spike in criminal activity, sexual abuse and even slavery. The construction of this type of industrial development also brings with it a collapse in health care, education, and sanitation infrastructure. Unfortunately, governmental protocol doesn't factor in these compound damages or the economic, social, cultural, and environmental losses that affect communities living near construction sites.

Since the construction of the Belo Monte dam began, the city of Altamira has been in a state of chaos in all social and public policy areas, especially health, public safety, and housing. Additionally, there has been rampant population growth and a rise in drug abuse and child prostitution, among other forms of violence. While the Belo Monte dam nears completion, there is a feeling of desperation throughout the city, a place that will soon be entirely flooded. Over 9,000 people have been displaced and are now homeless. There is nowhere to go.

For the people who once lived within and relied upon the forest for survival, industrial development such as mega-dam construction greatly impacts the natural balance, altering their

right to live in a healthy environment. That's why talking about human rights abuses in the Amazon requires the acknowledgement that environmental rights abuses are directly linked to human rights abuses.



Photo: Maira Irigaray/Amazon Watch

When a mega-dam is constructed, fishermen no longer have fish to catch, farmers have no land, indigenous peoples no longer retain cultural protection. Indigenous and local citizens who have been displaced are left without houses and abandoned by the government without any legal assistance. Sometimes within indigenous communities, corporations deploy an unethical strategy of "buying off" people, which leads to an increase in cultural disintegration, internal divisions, alcoholism, and cases of depression. Displaced communities often receive food packages as mitigation procedures, and so they

stop producing their own food, later finding it difficult to survive without government or corporate support after the food packages have been consumed. On top of that, should they decide to protect their home territory, indigenous rights defenders receive death threats by land invaders such as illegal loggers, migrant workers, and land speculators.

"The Belo Monte Dam is a major cancer on our Xingu [river], which consumes and slowly destroys our people," says Sheyla Juruna, a former leader of the Juruna People. "There is nothing worse than killing a people while they are alive; killing them little by little."

The compound effects of destructive industrial development are far reaching and sadly too often overlooked when discussing the viability of energy sources. The disrespect and disregard for the people who live in Altamira and the Xingu's Big Bend region are great human rights and environmental violations.

But this is not just about Belo Monte dam on the Xingu river. More mega-dams are scheduled to be built across the Amazon rainforest. It's up to us to support the indigenous communities defending their rights and their ancestral territories and working to stop such construction. So the next time you turn on your lights, think about where your energy comes from. And ask yourself, is the true cost worth it?



## AMAZON WATCH IN NUMBERS



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## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

### Canada's Top Court Rules in Favor of Ecuador Villagers in Chevron Case

Congratulations to the communities affected by Chevron in Ecuador for their groundbreaking victory in Canada this month! We continue to stand with them in the pursuit of justice and a full scale clean-up in the Amazon.

## Congratulations Amazon Watch!

Keep up your great work with indigenous communities to protect their lands



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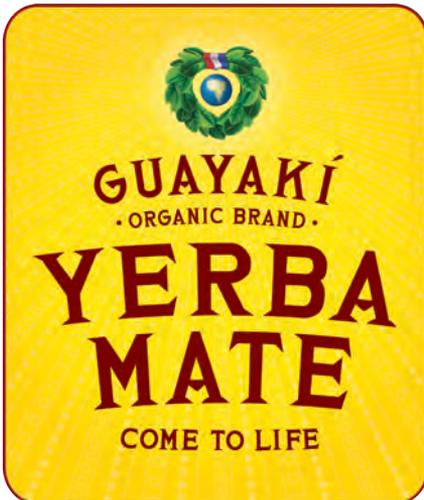


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The Numi Foundation's mission is to foster thriving communities by supporting initiatives that nurture art, education, health, and our natural environment.



The Numi Foundation congratulates Amazon Watch for their noble and heart-centered work in protecting the Amazon and the indigenous peoples who nurture our planet's rainforest!

For more information in partnering with the Numi Foundation, email [info@numifoundation.org](mailto:info@numifoundation.org).

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 The Center for Environmental Health (CEH) proudly salutes our friends at Amazon Watch for their breakthrough social and environmental justice work.

CEH's Justice Fund provides small grants to grassroots, community-based organizations that serve and are led by low-income people, people of color, indigenous peoples, and residents of disproportionately affected communities in California.

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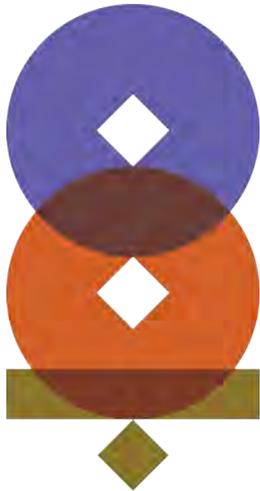


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*Neda Nobari Foundation honors Amazon Watch for its commitment to championing the fundamental human rights of indigenous communities and advocating for Earth justice in the Amazon.*

A woman in a red dress is seen from behind, holding a large, round, woven basket. She is standing in a field of tall grass and plants. The sun is shining brightly behind her, creating a silhouette effect and a lens flare. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds.

**Felicitaciones to the Amazon Watch team for another stellar year defending the Amazon and supporting the region's indigenous peoples!**

**A special congratulations to our new Executive Director, Leila Salazar-López. We are proud of your achievements and are excited by your vision and leadership for the future.**

*– Amazon Watch Board of Directors*



**PHOTOS:**

Cover: Caroline Bennett/Amazon Watch (top)  
Romina Luna (bottom)

Back: Caroline Bennett/Amazon Watch

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2201 Broadway Suite 508  
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Tel: 510-281-9020  
Fax: 510-281-9021

### WASHINGTON, DC

1350 Connecticut Avenue  
NW, Suite 1100  
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