

Abby Lodge

## Texaco vs Indigenous People of Ecuador

Beginning in the 1960s, Texaco went to northeastern Ecuador to tap into one of the largest oil reserves in the Americas. Texaco was a partner with Ecuador's national oil company, Petroecuador. Over 23 years Texaco pumped out one and a half billion barrels of oil, hundreds of wells were drilled and at each well site, pits were dug to hold toxic oil waste that comes up while drilling. Generally, two or three pits were carved out by the well site. Trouble is, when Texaco finished its drilling, waste pits were abandoned by the hundreds and for decades.

30,000 people are suing Texaco's owner, Chevron. Toxicants leaked into residents' water supplies and contaminated it. Texaco would have never been able to get away with this if this occurred in the United States. An Ecuadorian reporter stated that "since 1919, US laws have required that all contaminated waters that result from oil drilling be re-injected into the ground. But not in this country? Why? Because Texaco thought that the life of a human being in the third world is not worth anything." And in my opinion, probably to save themselves a few extra dollars by not cleaning up. But once done is twice done, so if they would have just cleaned up their mess 30 years ago, it might not be hitting them as financially hard as it is now.

Marlon Santi, a Kickwa Sarayaku Leader, said that "in our worldview, our territory cannot be sold. In our philosophy, our territory is like our Mother. Therefore, we respect her, we live from her, we are born from her, we grow in her, and we eventually return to her." Patricia Gualinga, another Kickwa Sarayaku Leader, said that "the indigenous world lives by a different cosmology. Oil does not mean the same as the western world. In the indigenous world, oil has its purpose, its spiritual balance. It is the blood of the Earth and maintains the balance of the Earth and the forces of nature." Leila Salazar, the campaign coordinator for Amazon Watch, says the Ecuadorian amazon is home to eight indigenous nationalities.

This is a historic case because it is the first time the law has forced a giant American oil company to come to a court in a South American country to face charges of massive environmental contamination and it has the potential to set a judicial precedent that could benefit millions of people around the world that suffer from living in areas where oil companies drill.