Dear Friends,

Amazon Watch was born in 1996 from a “vision” that came to me in a dream. In the dream, I was remotely operating a camera mounted on a satellite deep in space. As I aimed the lens over the Amazon, I gasped at the sight of thousands of fires that were burning out of control. I zoomed in further and could see up-close bulldozers, logging trucks and industrial machinery carving paths through the forest and forming arteries meant for exporting of logs, oil, and minerals. After the initial shock and despair that I experienced, I found that I had the power to transmit the images I was seeing in real time to large numbers of people. It seems that by transmitting what was happening in real time to sympathetic audiences around the planet, I could physically stop the destruction.

Over the past 13 years, Amazon Watch has grown to become an effective force in supporting indigenous and environmental movements on the front lines of halting destructive development. We have been a critical voice for articulating an alternative development path that honors and values the ecological systems of our planet.

The Amazon is vital in many ways including stabilizing our global climate, storing the largest reservoir of carbon and being a rain machine that cycles 20 percent of the world’s freshwater. It is also the largest storehouse of diversity, home to half of the Earth’s species and over 400 indigenous cultures.

Amazon Watch is blessed to have a brilliant and dedicated staff with decades of collective experience working in long-term partnerships with local communities and global allies. While we have celebrated many victories, the region is experiencing even bigger threats and in response Amazon Watch is being called upon by our partners to scale up our work. It is my hope that by bringing you the real time stories of the critical battles underway in the Amazon, you will join us and be a force for change. Investing in safeguarding tropical forests and supporting the local stewards is one of the smartest investments any of us can make for our future.

Atossa Soltani
Founder and Executive Director
ABOUT AMAZON WATCH

Founded in 1996, Amazon Watch works to protect the rainforest and advance the rights of indigenous peoples in the Amazon Basin. In our work, we partner with indigenous and environmental organizations in campaigns for human rights, corporate accountability and the preservation of the Amazon’s ecological systems. We believe that the most effective way to defend the Amazon rainforest is to support and advance the rights of indigenous peoples, whose territories encompass over one quarter of the Amazon rainforest, and who have lived in harmony with its abundant biodiversity for millennia.

Our Work
In the Amazon region of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, Amazon Watch is working directly with indigenous communities to build local capacity and advance long-term protection for their lands. We utilize the following strategies:

- Track and publicize new threats to the rainforest and indigenous peoples’ rights
- Support indigenous peoples in advancing their rights and securing title to their territories
- Strengthen the capacity of indigenous and local organizations to better advocate for their own rights
- Challenge the companies seeking to extract natural resources from indigenous lands and pristine forest frontiers, and the financiers supporting them
- Reform the policies of international financial institutions so that environmental and social safeguards are applied and enforced
- Win permanent protection for ecologically significant areas
- Promote green economic alternatives to the current export-oriented fossil fuel-based development model

Making a Difference
Amazon Watch campaigns have led to real change. Here are some recent examples:

- Supporting Peru’s indigenous movement in successfully forcing the Peruvian Congress to modify several Presidential decrees that attempted to roll back indigenous land rights
- Exposing oil industry abuses and contributing to the adoption of improved human rights and environmental policies in the case of Occidental Petroleum, Talisman, and Burlington Resources
- Thwarting ConocoPhillips and Burlington Resources’ attempts to drill for oil in Kichwa, Achuar, and Shuar territories in Southern Ecuador and Northern Peru
- Supporting the landmark class action lawsuit against Chevron Corporation (formerly Texaco) for its deliberate dumping of 18 billion gallons of toxic wastewater in a region of the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest inhabited by more than 30,000 people
- Contributing to policy reforms with global implications at international financial institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the US Export-Import Bank, and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation
- Successfully forcing Occidental Petroleum to withdraw from drilling on sacred U’wa land in Colombia and Achuar territory in Peru
- Supporting the Achuar in their historic resistance effort in Peru that led to a landmark agreement to end dumping of one million barrels of toxic waste by Pluspetrol
- Increasing capacity of our partner organizations—especially in Ecuador, Peru and Colombia—to assert their collective and territorial rights and advance an alternate vision for the development and conservation of their territories
The Clean Up Ecuador Campaign aims to force Chevron to take responsibility for its toxic legacy in Ecuador, where the company dumped 18.5 billion gallons of toxic wastewater over the course of three decades. Cancer rates in the area of the country’s rainforest have skyrocketed, and local people, including five indigenous groups, continue to depend upon oil-contaminated water for survival. In support of the landmark class-action lawsuit against Chevron in Ecuador, Amazon Watch is working to ensure the integrity of the judicial process, garner media coverage, and wage a public pressure campaign urging the company to clean up its toxic pollution, provide clean water and compensate the roughly 30,000 residents of the area for the health problems they continue to suffer.

The Protecting Ecuador’s Remaining Rainforests Program promotes an alternative vision of sustainable development for indigenous territories containing extraordinary biodiversity. A highlight of this program is Amazon Watch’s involvement in the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, directly aimed at curbing climate change. The pioneering plan of the Government of Ecuador proposes to leave Ecuador’s largest oil reserve unexploited. Nearly one billion barrels would be left in the ground beneath Yasuni National Park in exchange for compensation and debt cancellation. Amazon Watch also continues to monitor a de-facto oil exploration moratorium in effect in the pristine region of the southern Ecuadorian Amazon home to indigenous Achuar, Shuar and Kichwa peoples. Hard fought campaigns have stopped what was once “inevitable” oil extraction across a million acres of pristine rainforest. Yet new threats from tar sands mining and transportation corridors through protected zones remain, demanding our ongoing vigilance and support of local communities.

The Northern Peru Program is focused on supporting the Peruvian Achuar and other indigenous groups to protect nearly 20 million acres of well-
conserved primary rainforest. Amazon Watch is engaged in hard-hitting campaigns in partnership with the Achuar to stop new oil projects and change industry policies and practices. Corporate targets include Canada’s Talisman Energy and Petrolifta as well as the US-based Hunt Oil, Amerada Hess, and ConocoPhillips. Several companies have left the area after meeting steadfast resistance. Amazon Watch is also supporting the Achuar’s legal case aimed at forcing Occidental Petroleum (Oxy) to clean up the toxic mess the company left after 30 years of drilling in the Corrientes River. Oxy dumped over 9 billion barrels of toxic production waters directly in Achuar lands causing severe health and social impacts. Now Oxy and Pluspetrol, the company Oxy sold its concession to, are being forced to clean up their act.

Indigenous Capacity Building and Southern Peru

The Peruvian government is on an aggressive path to open up the entire Peruvian Amazon for hydrocarbon development. Already, 74 percent of the country’s rainforests have been leased to oil companies. This figure includes indigenous peoples’ territories, reserves for un-contacted peoples, as well as natural protected areas. President Garcia is publicly declaring that indigenous peoples who oppose extractive industries are the obstacles to Peru’s development. It is within this political environment that Amazon Watch is providing critical support to local partners to better position them to defend their rights and territories. In Southern Peru, Amazon Watch continues to hold the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank accountable for the social and environmental impacts of the egregious Camisea gas project while evaluating new threats to protected areas and isolated peoples territories. In partnership with national and regional indigenous organizations, Amazon Watch is providing specialized trainings, targeted funding for mobilizations and legal actions, and strategic communications campaigns to block industry’s advances.

The U’wa Defense Project

supports the U’wa people of Colombia in protecting their ancestral lands, rights and culture. This time the U’wa are being threatened by Ecopetrol, the Colombian state-owned oil company. Ecopetrol took over after the U’wa and supporters forced US-based Occidental Petroleum to abandon the project in 2002. Since then, Ecopetrol has been carrying out exploratory drilling from the Gibraltar Platform and has been seeking regulatory approval to explore within the boundaries of the U’wa Reservation. Amazon Watch continues to organize an international campaign and support a domestic campaign in Colombia focused on pressuring Ecopetrol and the Colombian government to cancel the oil project on U’wa lands. Given that Ecopetrol is currently in the process of partial privatization, Amazon Watch has worked to alert the international financial community to the human and environmental costs of its plans for U’wa territory.

Climate Change

Given that the preservation and protection of tropical rainforests is critical to the broader policy solutions now urgently required to address global climate change, Amazon Watch continues to advocate for long-term solutions in curtailing deforestation. The emerging discussion on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD), as well as the inclusion of forest-based climate mitigation in the carbon markets, is of great concern to indigenous peoples of the Amazon and elsewhere, as many peoples lack official legal title to their ancestral territories. Amazon Watch is actively working to make sure indigenous peoples’ concerns are heard in the debate about avoided deforestation and that their rights are respected in any future treaty on climate change.

IIRSA

Amazon Watch is expanding work on the Integration of Regional Infrastructure in South America scheme (IIRSA), a pan-regional meta-development blueprint of over 500 infrastructure projects that threatens to industrialize large areas of the Amazon. With the hire of our first Brazil IIRSA campaigner, we are helping build a stronger network with allied civil society groups in Brazil and beyond, working effectively to oppose IIRSA projects and strategically mobilize across national boundaries. In addition to confronting the Inter-American Development Bank for its funding of IIRSA projects, Amazon Watch is targeting the regional financial institutions and the corporations backing or profiting from IIRSA projects.
This year’s World Social Forum (WSF), held in the Brazilian city of Belém at the mouth of the Amazon River, offered Amazon Watch a unique opportunity to team up with indigenous partners to highlight the critical importance of preserving the Amazon rainforest. The WSF—a progressive bi-annual gathering of global civil society that seeks to offer a counterweight to the neoliberal World Economic Forum—featured over 90,000 people including an unprecedented gathering of indigenous peoples. In particular, those from the Amazon Basin traveled to Belém to make their voices heard. Together with local and international partners, Amazon Watch worked to unite and amplify these voices around an impassioned message: “Save the Amazon.”

The objective was to spell out a message in a large human banner on the grounds of the university where the WSF was being held. On the first morning of the WSF, the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of the Brazilian Amazon (COIAB), joined by the Indigenous Organization of the Amazon Basin (COICA), Rainforest Action Network, and Amazon Watch led more than 1,700 indigenous leaders, environmentalists, and activists to spell out “SALVE A AMAZÔNIA” and “SOS AMAZÔNIA” around the massive silhouette of an indigenous warrior taking aim with his bow and arrow. Taken from the air, images of the human banner were quickly beamed around the world drawing global attention to discussions at the WSF and stressing the urgent need to take action to protect the rainforest and support the rights of indigenous peoples.

While simple, the human banner’s message was a product of extensive deliberation. Initially, the Amazon Watch team sought a more assertive statement such as “Defend the Amazon,” yet when this was suggested to Marcos Apurinã, coordinator of COIAB, he replied emotionally: “We indigenous peoples have been defending the Amazon for centuries. We have been brutalized and forced from our lands, our forests have been razed and our villages burned. The time has passed to defend the Amazon—we must now ask the world to help us save what is left.”

Scientists predict that the Amazon is reaching a tipping point where ecological collapse could occur. Under current rates of deforestation, nearly 50 percent of the Amazon could be lost or severely degraded by the year 2020, with grave implications for global climate stability.

Amazon Watch Executive Director Atossa Soltani reflected: “We felt the mood was noticeably different than at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit when we were in the dawn of hope for humanity’s awakening. Now what I saw was guarded hope mixed with recognition that we are losing ground, mixed with deep love for the forest and sadness that it may be irreversibly lost in our lifetime. Over and over, we heard the leaders saying that the forest is speaking through them and that time is running out. Unless more of us urbanites band with the people of the forest, we face the collapse of this massive life giving system.”
CRUDE, the vivid new documentary by Joe Berlinger about devastating oil contamination in Ecuador, ends with the somber scene of Cofán indigenous people in a boat moving slowly downriver to an unspecified destination. As the conclusion to a film focused on high-octane courtroom drama with billions of dollars at stake, it is a welcome reminder of the real human lives that have motivated this struggle for justice from the beginning.

It has been over 40 years since Texaco, now owned by Chevron, descended on the Ecuadorian Amazon with bulldozers, helicopters and drilling rigs, and turned the Cofán world upside down forever. The damage that oil has done to the indigenous peoples and cultures of the region is irreversible. But hundreds of toxic waste pits in the forest floor—a situation that could be rectified—also continue to poison rainforest residents. The lawsuit to force Chevron to repair this damage and make amends is now in its 16th year, with any appeals process likely to draw it out even longer. Still, there are many reasons 2009 has been a critical juncture in a critical case for the global environmental justice movement. Three factors make this a crucial moment for Amazon Watch’s grassroots pressure campaign against the oil giant:

1. The public is taking notice. On the heels of a $27 billion damages estimate in 2008, the Chevron lawsuit has garnered unprecedented media attention in 2009, including an in-depth exposé on CBS’s 60 Minutes, and prominent stories and editorials in the largest American newspapers. CRUDE has sold out theaters in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, and promises to bring this remarkable story to a much larger audience. It is currently scheduled to run in over 40 cities.

2. Chevron is scared. As its legal strategy crashes and burns in the face of scientific evidence, Chevron has launched an aggressive PR offensive. Its spurious September attempt to implicate Judge Juan Nuñez in a trumped-up bribery scandal suggests that Chevron’s legal team feels it’s backed itself into a corner. Shareholders, including major pension funds, are increasingly asking hard questions of the company. Chevron may be wishing it had dealt with this differently years ago, rather than having staked its hopes on not giving in and outlasting the plaintiffs’ determination.

3. This case is going to be a game-changer. No longer are only activists talking about the lawsuit and observing its progress. In 2009 the business press, Wall Street analysts, and most importantly, the oil industry itself all anticipate the prospect of a verdict. A ruling against Chevron will prove that companies operating anywhere can and will be held financially liable for an abhorrent but all too common sort of negligence: adhering to one set of environmental and human rights standards in the U.S. and Europe, and a different one in the developing world.

The Clean Up Ecuador Campaign continues to place crucial pressure on Chevron. Chevron’s general counsel Charles James promises plaintiffs a “lifetime of litigation,” but we are determined to make further attempts to make the trial more costly for the oil company, in terms of PR and image, than doing the right thing and cleaning up Ecuador. The Cofán and all other residents of the Ecuadorian Amazon have waited long enough for justice. Chevron would like to keep them waiting forever. But we believe the signs show 2009 was truly the beginning of the end for this callous strategy of delay and denial. Justice will have its day in the long-suffering Ecuadorian Amazon. And when it does, the rest of the world will be watching.
After two months of peaceful indigenous protests across the Amazon, on June 5, 2009, armed police violently attacked a roadblock occupied by 3,000 indigenous people in the northern Peruvian Amazon province of Bagua. The ensuing violence left more than 200 protesters hospitalized and at least 34 people dead, including indigenous peoples, local townspeople and police officers. The June 5th incident became a watershed moment for Peru’s policies related to the Amazon. The tragedy has led to an unprecedented level of national debate and international outcry about deep-rooted abuses and threats facing indigenous peoples.

For nearly two months prior, some 30,000 Indigenous people had paralyzed transportation and commerce throughout the Peruvian Amazon demanding that the Congress repeal a series of decrees that would make it easy for the Government to grant indigenous lands to multinational oil, mining, and energy corporations. Passed between December 2007 and June 2008, some 99 new laws were promulgated under executive powers Congress had granted to President Alan Garcia in order to implement the Free Trade Agreement with the United States. In sum, the decrees systematically undermined the legal rights of indigenous peoples to their territories, promoted the privatization of lands currently under communal control, reverted lands classified as abandoned and unproductive to state control and enabled petroleum and mining companies to enter indigenous lands without prior negotiation with communities.

It was in August of 2008 when indigenous peoples first launched a national strike in protest, closing river travel and marching in major towns in the Amazon. Eventually the government agreed to repeal two of the decrees: 1015 and 1073, which would have made it easier for a third party to buy land from an indigenous community without the consent of the majority. The government also agreed to set up a special committee within Congress to investigate the legality and the impact
of the new laws on indigenous peoples. The protests were called off.

On April 9, 2009, after more than seven months of waiting for the government to fulfill its promise, Amazonian indigenous peoples called for new protests, organizing road and river blockades across the region. The strikes were, on the part of the indigenous peoples, entirely peaceful. However, in early May, the Peruvian government declared much of the Amazon in a State of Emergency, employing new tactics and authorizing military intervention to resolve the protests.

Events of June 5th
On June 4th, the Peruvian Congress was scheduled to discuss the possible repeal of one of the more controversial laws (1090), however Congress postponed the debate. President Alan Garcia was reported in the national press declaring: "The time for dialogue is over, it is time to bring order back to the country."

That evening, a meeting was held between local police, indigenous and religious leaders in the town of Jaén near Bagua. The police chief is reported as informing the meeting that he had received orders to clear the road on June 5 or 6, but that he would give the protesters until 10am on June 5 to leave peacefully, before using any force.

Before dawn on the morning of the 5th, armed police entered the area from various directions and fired tear gas and real bullets at the peaceful protestors and by 7am had cleared the roadblock at the Curva del Diablo. It appears that the protestors fought back in apparent self-defense and disarmed and killed some of the police officers. Shooting took place not only on the road but up in the hills around the blockade where it seems police followed indigenous people who fled when the attack began.

The police advanced along the road, continually firing guns and tear gas, backed up by helicopters dropping tear gas bombs. The police beat those they managed to detain. By the time the protesters reached a major crossroad known as the Reposa, they met crowds of non-indigenous peoples coming to meet them from Bagua Chica and Bagua Grande, who had heard about the conflict on the radio and were coming to support the indigenous protesters. Protests then continued in Bagua Chica and Bagua Grande.

Six hours away by car on the northern Peruvian oil pipeline over 3,000 indigenous peoples had been occupying an oil pumping station for several weeks. It appears that when these protestors heard about the clashes and killings in Bagua they took thirteen police hostage and in retaliation executed them. There are no confirmed numbers of how many police were killed in Bagua and how many in pumping station 6, but in total the violence resulted in 24 police deaths.

The killing of police officers was tragic. Amazon Watch regrets how many lives were lost during these conflicts. Killing on all sides only served to worsen the conflict and inflict pain and suffering on many families.

The official government figures list ten civilian deaths and more 200 injured from the clashes. However, these have been called into question by numerous indigenous and human rights organizations, and the United Nations has called for an impartial and thorough investigation of what took place.

The Battle for Public Opinion
Following the clashes, the government immediately started a campaign to portray indigenous peoples as the instigators of the violence. A government television ad shown repeatedly the following Monday portrayed indigenous peoples as "extremists" and "savages" with unreasonable demands who attacked honorable policemen defending the Peruvian flag.

Meanwhile, the government began the legal persecution of all indigenous leaders involved in the protests nationally, ordering their arrest with trumped up and unsubstantiated
accusations and forcing the head of Peru’s national indigenous organization, Alberto Pizango, into exile in Nicaragua.

Amazon Watch was in Peru on the day of the clashes and in Bagua the following morning. We spent the next week in an urgent news cycle collecting data and testimony as well as photos and videos from local journalists that told the local peoples’ story of what had happened. From Peru and the U.S., our team issued press releases and conducted outreach to international media outlets including CNN, AP, Reuters, BBC, Democracy Now, NPR, New York Times and Al Jazeera to ensure that their coverage did not just take the government’s version of events for granted.

In the following weeks, Amazon Watch coordinated petitions to demand the Peruvian government stop using force to resolve social conflict and request the end to politically motivated persecution of indigenous leaders. More than 5,000 people signed our action alerts that played an important role in pressuring the government to come to the negotiating table and rescind the capture order on some of the leaders.

On June 18, after an unprecedented global outcry, the Peruvian Congress voted to repealed two more decrees and publicly admitted there had been “a series of errors and exaggerations” in the government’s handling of this conflict.

The majority of the Peruvian public surveyed, over 85 percent, agreed that the government should be consulting indigenous peoples.

Since then, the government has resumed negotiations with indigenous leaders to discuss solutions to their concerns and demands. However, the situation remains tense. Indigenous peoples believe that the government is acting too slowly and doing the minimum possible to improve the situation. Alberto Pizango is still in exile in Nicaragua and may face criminal charges. There is concern that as the international spotlight moves on from Peru the government will return to its old policies and push the situation into violent conflict once again.

In the past three years, over 74 percent of the Peruvian Amazon has been leased out to oil and gas companies, the majority on indigenous lands. This alarming trend has not abated. Amazon Watch will continue to work with indigenous peoples to make sure their voices are heard and pressure the government to respond peacefully to the legitimate concerns of indigenous peoples over their territories, their rights, and their future physical and cultural survival.
We all know the dynamic. Crude prices hit $127 dollars a barrel, and everybody is out looking for a way to suck oil out of the ground. Ecuador is no different, and the first major oil sands project in the Amazon Basin has been green lighted by the government to move ahead any day now, despite major environmental and social concerns and serious questions about the project’s economic viability.

The oil concession, known as Block 20, covers over 400 square miles, 250 square miles of which is the Pungarayacu oil field. According to experts, the reserve holds anywhere between 4.3 and 12.1 billion barrels of “oil-in-place”, which would make it Ecuador’s largest heavy oil reserve and one of the largest in South America. Ivanhoe Energy Ecuador Inc. (a subsidiary of Canadian company Ivanhoe Energy Inc.) was granted the concession despite the company’s poor environmental record and the fact that its technology to transform heavy crude to light crude has not been proven commercially viable.

The block is in the heart of the Napo Province, known for its outstanding tropical rainforests and rivers. The region boasts high levels of biodiversity and endemic species, while its waterways are home to some of the best kayaking and river rafting on the planet. Tena, a pleasant town of approximately 45,000 people, is located in the middle of Block 20. The region is also home to thousands of Kichwa indigenous peoples who live traditional subsistence lifestyles.

The proposed project is highly controversial. First, Pungarayacu is essentially a tar sands mining project. This type of extraction, now being carried out in the deserts of Alberta, Canada and the Orinoco Delta region of Venezuela, is known to be one of the most environmentally damaging forms of oil exploitation. Massive amounts of water and natural gas are needed to power the project, as the viscous crude needs to be heated and mixed to be able to flow through the existing pipeline infrastructure. Second, the Pungarayacu reserve is located directly beneath communal land owned by the Kichwa, who hold land title to thousands of hectares. The Kichwa are adamantly against the project despite Ivanhoe’s “in-depth community relations program with indigenous and local populations.”

Given the immense threat to the fragile ecosystems of the region as well as indigenous opposition, Amazon Watch has begun partnering with local communities and working to influence the project. Over the past several months Amazon Watch has:

- Brought together a coalition of indigenous, environmental, and civil society organizations to analyze the project and develop collective strategies to intervene and derail the project;
- Provided on-going technical and environmental analysis on the project to Kichwa leaders and grassroots community members in several meetings in Quito and in the community of Rucullacta;
- Organized and attended press briefings for Ecuador’s major newspaper El Comercio and Ecuador’s Channel 4 news team; and
- Worked with Kichwa leaders in bringing a legal challenge to the company and the Ecuadorian government over the failure to properly consult affected communities.

There is much more that needs to be done. It is our hope that together with the Kichwa we can prevail against this project and continue to ensure the protection of Ecuador’s remaining rainforests.
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE U’WA?
By Andrew E. Miller

Colombia’s emblematic indigenous people fight on in the decades-old struggle against oil and gas extraction in their territory.

In the 1990’s, the U’wa indigenous people reached forth from the cloud forests of Colombia and captured the world’s imagination. Their plea to defend the blood of their Mother Earth inspired thousands of activists to campaign fiercely by their side. U.S.-based oil company Occidental Petroleum (OXY) was eventually forced to cancel its plans to drill in the heart of U’wa sacred territory. Global attention spiked in 1999 when three U.S. activists were martyred during a solidarity visit to the U’wa in the midst of Colombia’s raging civil war.

Many people the world over still hold the U’wa in their hearts, often asking what became of this courageous and charismatic people. Our answer: their struggle continues to this day and is as important as ever.

OXY’s departure did not resolve the U’wa’s precarious situation. Their territory continues to hold precious natural resources, and remains a strategic prize contested by Colombia’s still-warring military and guerrilla actors. OXY’s former drilling platforms originally designed for oil have instead discovered natural gas, and Colombia’s state-run oil company Ecopetrol could start pumping as soon as December of this year.

The U’wa are also threatened by a proposed road to Venezuela that would bi-sect their territory and increase the region’s military presence. A New York Times article recently detailed how the government wants to expand eco-tourist activities in the Cocuy National Park into sacred areas, against U’wa opposition. Earlier this year, Colombia’s Constitutional Court listed the U’wa amongst a handful of indigenous groups at risk of extinction.

The U’wa solidarity campaign, though of lower intensity than in past years, continues to play itself out on local and international stages. As Ecopetrol works to access international financial markets for investments, Amazon Watch is helping the U’wa leadership bring their message to financial actors such as JPMorgan Chase (Ecopetrol’s partner on Wall Street) and sympathetic socially responsible investment funds.

In November we facilitated a two-week advocacy visit to New York City and Washington, DC, which included meetings with investors, media, ally organizations, US indigenous institutions, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and several congressional offices.

On the ground, the U’wa are making their voice heard through local protests, a courageous action in Colombia’s repressive environment. This past year nearly 1,000 U’wa marched to Ecopetrol’s platform at Gibraltar, protesting the operation. And this year they have another such mobilization in the works, which will coincide with the International Day of Action for Indigenous Rights and Mother Earth on October 12th.

The U’wa struggle is entering a critical phase. After years of conflicts, protests, violence and victories, the long-threatened extraction of hydrocarbon resources could be around the corner. The ability of the U’wa to thwart this threat will depend on their own courage and conviction, and the support they receive from allies like you and me.
I will forever be struck by my initial encounter with the mighty Madeira River flowing by the city of Porto Velho. The first morning of my fact-finding trip to Brazil’s Southwestern Amazon I walked to the banks of the river to immediately see the surface broken by a pink dolphin cresting and diving in the current. Viewing this beautiful creature playing in the free-flowing waters of the Madeira was amazing in itself, but the significance of this sighting was perhaps more profound: they are both symbols of the Amazon’s wild, untamed beauty and both are in imminent threat of destruction.

Meeting with local activists and academics fighting the Madeira Complex, I learned of the challenges these activists face building an effective, unified response to the government and consortiums responsible for the dams. The commitment of Brazilian activists and social movements has always been a source of inspiration to me. As such, I was honored by the generous offer from seasoned leaders of the Movement of People Affected by Dams to accompany me to communities up the Madeira River.

At first sight the tiny riverside village of Teotónio, named for the powerful rapids that run by it, seemed to be lost in time, a world away from the bustle of Porto Velho. The simple yet powerful lifeline that exists between fishing communities like Teotónio and the Madeira is undeniable. “I can live for a week on five reais [$2.75],” said one resident I spoke to. “I throw a line in the river, catch a fish, share with my neighbors...we don’t need anything else to live well.” People go about their daily lives with seemingly little regard, or perhaps in disbelief, that this lifeline will soon be broken: Teotónio and dozens of communities like it will be submerged under the fetid reservoirs of the Madeira Complex mega-dams.

On my way through the region’s denuded landscapes to visit an Oro Wari community I conjured up striking satellite images of indigenous territories standing alone like green sanctuaries in a sea of deforestation. But to encounter the physical demarcation of Oro Wari territory—an imposing wall of preserved forest facing out onto deforested wasteland—was a telling experience. It re-confirmed the urgency of Amazon Watch’s support for the human rights of Amazonian indigenous peoples. This is why we must be tireless in our efforts to stop mega-projects like the Madeira Complex—and to challenge the rationale for these projects—as they are an assault on the way of life of indigenous peoples that protect and sustain the forests. As local leader Eleazar Oro Wari affirmed, “If they build this dam how will we cope without fish? This is not the company’s river - they can’t come here to make money. We have been here for many years and we need the fish that live in this river.”

Throughout my travels I frequently returned to that peaceful moment of watching a pink dolphin swim in the natural flow of the Madeira River. The dolphin’s existence is a sign that the river, its diverse fish species, the communities it sustains, and the forest it flows through, remain alive. While what I encountered in Brazil was shocking, it strengthened my conviction that we must all carry on with this important work for the future of the Amazon.
REDD: THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

By Andrew E. Miller

Proposals to confront climate change could exacerbate the ages old tension between protecting forests and protecting the people who live there.

We all agree that reducing deforestation is an unambiguous moral good, right? Many environmental groups are looking to massively scale up global conservation efforts in the name of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions. They note that tropical forest loss is responsible for roughly 20 percent of annual global emissions. Welcome to the latest eco-nomenclature: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation, or REDD.

While the concept seems morally unimpeachable, the details—and potential implications—of various REDD proposals have indigenous communities and rights advocates extremely concerned. Over the years, conservation efforts have often conflicted with the rights of local people. According to Mark Dowie, author of Conservation Refugees, "The number of people displaced from traditional homelands worldwide over the past century, in the interest of conservation, is estimated to be close to 20 million." Forced evictions are often brutal, and the typical outcome for indigenous peoples is impoverishment. Globally 1.6 billion people, including 60 million indigenous people, depend on forests for their livelihoods.

If REDD proponents are successful, billions of dollars will flow annually through different mechanisms to REDD projects in countries like Brazil and Indonesia. How can we avoid history repeating itself? In countries where indigenous peoples’ land claims are not legally safeguarded, REDD could bring about displacement. Another issue is that the UN Climate Convention’s definition of a forest, unlike those used by other UN agencies, does not make a distinction between an intact natural forest and a monoculture tree plantation. Lastly, in the current REDD framework, destroyers rather than protectors of the forest would receive financial reward.

For indigenous peoples and their supporters, the answer is simple: ensure that any agreement enshrines indigenous rights from the outset. Specifically, advocates have been working to insert the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) into any REDD framework.

Though most U.N. member states formally support UNDRIP, the obstacles are formidable. For one, the U.S. does not support the Declaration, and is opposed to the insertion of human rights norms in the REDD framework. Furthermore, many governments’ enthusiasm for the non-binding Declaration could evaporate if it were given teeth through actual enforcement mechanisms. And linking it to billions of dollars in REDD funding would make for sharp teeth indeed.

This stance by some of the major global powers has provoked a global advocacy campaign involving hundreds of indigenous groups and civil society allies from all inhabited continents. A primary field of action has been the official meetings in preparation for the upcoming U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December. From Bonn to Bangkok, indigenous leaders have confronted national delegations and forcefully argued for mitigation and adaptation strategies centered on indigenous rights, culture, and traditional knowledge.

Recognizing the urgency of this struggle, Amazon Watch has accompanied Amazonian indigenous leaders to official U.N. meetings and civil society gatherings, like the World Social Forum in Belem, Brazil and the Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit on Climate Change, in Anchorage, Alaska. As stated in the Summit’s final statement, “Mother Earth is no longer in a period of climate change, but in climate crisis. We therefore insist on an immediate end to the destruction and desecration of the elements of life.” The time has come to fully support indigenous peoples—who have successfully conserved their own environments for millennia—as they add their crucial voice to the race to save humanity from our own excesses.
Global Exchange proudly works with Amazon Watch on the True Costs of Chevron.

Hats off to the entire Amazon Watch team! Thanks for leading by example and showing us what solidarity looks like!

Rockwood Leadership Institute congratulates Amazon Watch for 13 years of visionary leadership.

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for 13 years of
outstanding work
defending the
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Thank you Amazon Watch for your vitally important work protecting the rainforest and advancing the rights of indigenous peoples in the Amazon Basin.

We support you in our shared mission to support the biological and cultural diversity that sustain the environment.

Please join us for our 10th Annual Brower Youth Awards on October 20th in San Francisco, and visit with us at the David Brower Center in Berkeley.

www.earthisland.org       www.broweryouthawards.org
Rainforest Information Centre Small Grants Fund is proud to once again support the work of Amazon Watch!

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You will learn first-hand what you can do to help protect the Amazon rainforest and its inhabitants.

Join us for an experience that will open your eyes and change your life.

Space is limited. Reserve today.
Contact Paul Paz y Miño,
phone: 415-487-9500 or
email: paz@amazonwatch.org
20 percent: The amount of all fresh water on Earth that flows through the Amazon

4,080 miles: The length of the Amazon River, equal to the distance between New York and Berlin

3,000: The number of fish species found in the Amazon and its tributaries

33 percent: The proportion of all birds on the planet found in the Amazon

500 miles: The range of movement of one jaguar

$898,000: The funding Amazon Watch has contributed to Amazonian partner organizations in small capacity building and equipment grants since 1999

80 percent: The proportion of Amazon Watch’s budget that was spent directly on program services and funds to groups in the Amazon in 2008

13 people: Amazon Watch’s staff

$998,000: Amazon Watch’s total 2008 budget.

18.5 billion: The number of gallons of toxic waste that Chevron (formerly Texaco) dumped into an area of the Northern Ecuadorian Amazon that is home to tens of thousands of people

$27 billion: Revised amount that a court-appointed independent expert proposed Chevron pay to compensate for the environmental contamination it caused to Ecuador’s Amazon rainforest

3: The number of UN member countries refusing to sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the United States, Canada and Australia)

74 percent: The proportion of the Peruvian Amazon currently zoned into oil and gas concessions

4,984 square miles: The area of the Brazilian Amazon deforested during 2008

50 percent: The proportion of the Amazon expected to be deforested or seriously degraded by 2020 given current trends

20-25 percent: The proportion of global warming gas emissions created by global deforestation

350: Number of parts per million of CO2 that leading climate experts recommend as the safe upper limit in our atmosphere to avoid tipping points and irreversible impacts

390: The parts per million of CO2 measured in our atmosphere now

AMAZON WATCH STAFF

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PHOTOS:
Cover, top: A group of Kayapo march during the World Social Forum in Brazil (Christian Poirier / Amazon Watch)
Cover, bottom: Over 1,700 Indigenous people form a human banner (Lou Dematteis / SpectralQ)
Back cover: (Antoine Bonsorte / Amazon Watch)