Many people realize that Amazon rainforest is the world’s largest and most biodiverse tropical rainforest, covering an area larger than the continental United States. What more people are coming to understand is that the Amazon rainforest plays a critical role in regulating our global climate. Waves of hot humid air leave the Amazon and travel across the planet, contributing to atmospheric circulation that drives weather systems from the U.S. to Asia, affecting the strength and timing of the monsoons and hurricanes. Scientists report that deforestation in the Amazon can adversely affect rainfall as far away as California and Mexico.

The rainforests of the Amazon basin are also one of the world’s largest reservoirs of carbon. Deforestation in the Amazon basin now emits an estimated 600 million tons of carbon a year, more than U.S. automobile use.

Scientists warn that Amazon deforestation is reaching a critical tipping point that will lead to entire forest systems collapsing for lack of recycled rain. The basin has already lost 15-17 percent of its forest cover and an equal area has been degraded. 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.

Carbon emissions from tropical deforestation compose nearly 25 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. In turn, climate change is making tropical rainforests more vulnerable to forest fires and droughts, leading to more deforestation. This positive feedback loop threatens the very survival of the Amazon rainforest and life on our fragile planet.

Deforestation is fueled by shortsighted industrial “development.” Dams, oil and gas pipelines, roads, as well as large-scale logging and agribusiness open up pristine rainforest areas, with devastating effects for indigenous communities, biodiversity, and our global climate.

Thus, Amazon Watch’s work with indigenous peoples to protect their Amazonian homelands could not be more urgent.

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The Amazon: Our Planet’s Largest Tropical Rainforest

**Basin area:** Just over 2.7 million square miles, nearly the size of the United States

**Population:** Approximately 3.3 million

**Indigenous population:** 1.7 million people; more than 350 indigenous and ethnic groups

**Biodiversity:** One-third of the world’s species live here, including 40,000 plant species. It is a refuge for jaguars, harpy eagles, pink dolphins, manatees, two-toed sloths, howler monkeys and the world’s richest diversity of birds, freshwater fish and butterflies

**Water resources:** One-fifth of the world’s flow of freshwater

**Average annual deforestation 2000-2005 (Brazil):** 8,297 square miles

**Estimated percent deforested (Basin-wide):** 15-17 percent

**Carbon Sink:** roughly 90-140 billion metric tons of carbon

**Countries with land inside the Amazon Basin:** Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname

Sources: Woods Hole Research Center, World Wildlife Fund
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
- 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:

- 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
- Contributing to policy reforms with global implications at international financial institutions such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the U.S. Export-Import Bank, and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation
- Exposing oil industry abuses and contributing to the adoption of improved human rights and environmental policies in the case of Occidental Petroleum and Burlington Resources
- 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
- Thwarting ConocoPhillips and Burlington Resources’ attempts to drill for oil in Kichwa, Achuar, and Shuar territories in Southern Ecuador and Northern Peru
- 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 which led to a landmark agreement to end dumping of one million barrels of toxic waste by Pluspetrol
The Clean Up Ecuador Campaign aims to force Chevron to take responsibility for its toxic legacy in the Ecuadorian Amazon, where the company dumped 18.5 billion gallons of toxic wastewater over the course of three decades. Cancer rates in the area 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 bring direct pressure to bear on company management through Securities and Exchange Commission inquiries, shareholder resolutions, and city selective purchasing measures.

The Ecuador Rainforest Protection Program supports alternatives to oil extraction in indigenous territories containing extraordinary biodiversity. A highlight of this program is Amazon Watch's involvement in the implementation of the Yasuni-ITT Initiative, directly aimed at curbing climate change. The pioneering plan of the Government of Ecuador proposes to leave its largest oil reserve unexploited; nearly one billion barrels found beneath the Yasuni National Park in exchange for $3.5 billion in compensation and debt cancellation. The threat to indigenous Achuar, Shuar, and Kichwa traditional territories has diminished, allowing Amazon Watch and our allies to focus on long-term solutions and alternatives.

The Northern Peru Program is focused on supporting the Peruvian Achuar in two river basins by: 1) challenging new oil projects which currently overlap 100 percent the Achuar's pristine territories; and 2) demanding cleanup and reparations for past harm caused by Occidental Petroleum's negligent practices in the Corrientes region of Achuar territory. 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 Petrolifera as well as U.S.-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 are being forced to clean up their act.

Defending Peru’s Amazon Rainforest
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.
Throughout Peru, Amazon Watch is campaigning to keep protected areas and isolated peoples territories off limits to extractive industries. In partnership with national level 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 company. Ecopetrol took over after the U'wa and supporters forced U.S.-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 is launching a campaign calling on U.S. investors to not purchase Ecopetrol shares.

Climate Change
Responding to increased awareness of the effects of Amazon deforestation on global climate change, Amazon Watch is working with partner communities to increasingly monitor and publicize its root causes and solutions. Given that the preservation 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. 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 increasingly monitoring 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. We have joined an alliance of organizations working effectively to oppose IIRSA projects and strategically mobilize across national boundaries to challenge key projects. Amazon Watch is working to target the regional financial institutions and the corporations backing or profiting from IIRSA projects.
The following are excerpts from the declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on September 13, 2007. This landmark declaration defines a set of standards to protect and advance the rights and the worldviews of indigenous peoples.

Recognizing the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies, especially their rights to their lands, territories and resources,

Recognizing that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment,

Affirming the fundamental importance of the right to self-determination of all peoples...

Recognizing and reaffirming that indigenous peoples possess collective rights which are indispensable for their existence, well-being and integral development as peoples...

**Article 3**
Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

**Article 4**
Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs...

**Article 8**
1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.

**Article 18**
Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures...

**Article 25**
Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas ... and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

**Article 26**
1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.

**Article 29.1**
Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment.

**Article 32.2**
States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources.

For over three decades in Ecuador, Chevron chose profit over people. While drilling in the Ecuadorian Amazon, Chevron deliberately dumped more than 18 billion gallons of toxic wastewater into the region’s rivers and waterways and spilled roughly 17 million gallons of crude oil in order to save an estimated $3 per barrel of oil. Thousands of indigenous peoples and campesinos have been paying the price, suffering from mouth and uterine cancer, birth defects and spontaneous miscarriages. Now, in a struggle of epic proportions, thousands of rainforest dwellers are demanding justice in a landmark class action lawsuit.

Decades after causing what experts are calling “the worst oil related disaster on the planet,” Chevron finally appears to be sinking in its own toxic mess. Earlier this year, in a long-awaited court report submitted as part of the final phase of “the environmental trial of the century,” an independent court-appointed expert concluded that Chevron should pay up to $16 billion to compensate for massive toxic contamination caused to Ecuador’s Amazon rainforest during a 26-year period when the oil giant operated a large concession in the country.

Faced with the real prospect of losing this case, Chevron has ramped up its desperate efforts to undermine the legal claims of thousands of vulnerable indigenous peoples and campesinos who continue to suffer an exploding public health crisis. A final decision in the case is expected in 2009 with our sights set on justice for the affected communities of Ecuador including clean water, clean soil, health care, and compensation initiatives. Amazon Watch’s Clean Up Ecuador Campaign has been working around the clock to defend the integrity of the judicial process in Ecuador, to keep the heat on Chevron management in the Bay Area, and to ensure that the truth takes hold in the court of public opinion. The task has never been more important.

In Their Own Words

The following quotes from the book Crude Reflections, illustrate the depth of human impact caused by the contamination.

The [Texaco] waste pits were upriver, and we drank water downriver. After bathing, our skin was covered with crude. I went to the oil companies, and they said this wouldn’t affect me; that the reason I had cancer was because I didn’t have good personal hygiene. If I could say something to the oil companies, I’d tell them not to contaminate the land because they are killing people, making people suffer with this contamination. I have six children, and it’s very sad for me to think that maybe my children will lose their mother.

— Maria Garofalo, San Carlos

I am from the Shuar indigenous nation. I came here in 1978, looking for a better life. We had 8 children but our 2 daughters died. When I arrived, Texaco had already drilled [Auca Sur] oil well #12 along with its open waste pit. The stream was 50 meters from our house and chemicals were dumped into it. Oh, it stank! The water ran like a natural stream, but it was warm toxic waste water [formation water]. We had headaches, dizziness, stomachaches. And there was nowhere to make a complaint, no institution, no agency, no one to turn to.

— Miguel Mashumar, Texaco Auca Oil Field/Via Auca mile 28

Towards A Green Ecuador

By Kevin Koenig

For a country no greater in size than the state of Nevada, Ecuador is making big waves. Under President Rafael Correa, the small Andean country is attempting to undergo a sea change from prior administrations that were focused primarily on export driven natural resource extraction at great expense to Ecuador’s rare and diverse ecosystems and the rights of its many indigenous peoples.

The Rights of Nature in Ecuador’s New Constitution

The end of September 2008 ushered in a new era in Ecuador, and an environmental first among nations worldwide. With nearly 70 percent approval, Ecuador adopted a new constitution that includes precedent setting language giving inalienable rights to nature:

“Nature or Pachamama, where life is reproduced and exists, has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution. Every person, people, community or nationality, will be able to demand the recognition of rights for nature before public institutions.”

In essence, the articles provide explicit legal protection for nature and change the legal status of the country’s ecosystems from property to a right-bearing entity. This new bill of rights for nature gives it similar status to those of citizens and makes it easier for citizens to hold companies, individuals and the government accountable for violations of these rights.

Additionally, guiding environmental principles such as sustainability, precaution, prevention, responsibility, and participation are included, as well as specific language regarding climate change and prioritizing emission reductions.

Article 409 of the constitution now bans resource extraction in national parks and areas declared as areas intangibles, or no go zones. The exception would be in areas determined to be of important national priority. In such an event, approval by Congress or potentially a national referendum would be required for resource extraction to occur.

Protecting a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve From Oil Drilling

Last year, Ecuador proposed the impossible—to keep its largest oil discovery in decades in the ground. The heavy crude reserves total up to 1 billion barrels and are tempting for a net oil exporter and OPEC member whose petroleum accounts for more than one-third of its GDP. Yet the oil lies beneath Yasuni National Park, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve about the size of Massachusetts, home to indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation.

According to a 2005 letter by leading scientists including E.O. Wilson, Jane Goodall, Paul Ehrlich and Thomas Lovejoy to the leaders of Ecuador:

“Yasuni may well be the single most biodiverse forest on earth. It is home to a large stretch of the world’s most diverse tree community, with almost as many different species of trees in just 2.5 acres of rainforest than all the tree species in the U.S. and Canada combined. Yasuni is critical habitat to 23 globally threatened mammal species, including the Giant otter, the Amazonian manatee, Pink river dolphin, Giant anteater, and Amazonian tapir. An astounding 10 primate species live in the Yasuni, including the threatened White-bellied spider monkey.”

Ecuador’s proposal to the world is that it would keep its oil in the ground if the international community would financially match half of Ecuador’s forgone oil revenues. The revenues that Ecuador would receive would go towards funding key alternative energy projects and set the stage for the country’s energy transition, moving Ecuador beyond petroleum in the...
somewhat near future. The Yasuni-ITT initiative, named for the park and the three oil reserves, Ishpingo, Tambococha, Tiputini, has garnered widespread support, both for its innovation and its potential post-Kyoto precedent, which would establish a model for avoided carbon emissions.

Amazon Watch has been instrumental in serving as environmental and political advisor to the Government of Ecuador on the initiative, helping provide feasibility analysis, identifying funding opportunities, winning recognition at the Clinton Global Initiative, and working to maintain the proposal’s integrity by averting the initiative’s co-option by companies like Chevron or intentions to finance the proposal solely through carbon trading.

Some have met the proposal with skepticism owing to Ecuador’s fifty-year-old relationship with oil extraction; a tale of corruption, spiraling external debt, entrenched poverty, human rights violations, environmental free-fire zones, and indigenous cultures pushed to the brink. Yet this break from business as usual in the oil patch is a refreshing and needed shift that deserves support. And while important guarantees and financial details are still needed, the proposal has garnered interest and support from many countries, including Germany, Italy, Spain, and Norway among others.

Oil Moratorium in Southern Ecuador
Meanwhile, new oil exploration in Ecuador’s southern Amazon is on hold. Threats to indigenous Achuar, Shuar, and Kichwa traditional territories have diminished after nearly a decade of hard fought campaigns on the ground and inside and outside company shareholder meetings. What seemed like “inevitable” oil extraction in two existing blocks, and potentially millions of rainforest acres up for auction as new oil blocks, has become an area ripe for new conservation efforts seeking permanent protection, allowing Amazon Watch and allies to focus on long-term solutions and alternatives.
Territorial Integrity: How the Achuar People are Fighting for their Land and Lives

By Maria Lya Ramos

“We came to Canada to tell the executives and shareholders of Talisman that we will not accept oil operations on our territory. In our vision of the world, our forests are healthy and free of contamination. We do not base our development on oil, but on other resources which we have in our forests, living in harmony with Mother Earth.”

Living in the remote Northern Peruvian Amazon, the Achuar’s successful stand off with oil companies has been a source of strength and inspiration for indigenous peoples throughout Peru and beyond. The Achuar’s campaign for the protection of their land and culture is deeply rooted in their worldview that they are the guardians of the forest. Achuar elders often provide guidance to the tribe’s leadership through vision quests ceremonies.

Roughly 13,600 Achuar live in the Peruvian Amazon. Of these, nearly 8,000 live in the Pastaza river basin, on a territory that covers 2.7 million acres. For the Achuar, land is sacred and has a particular function and meaning—whether it’s a regularly visited fishing and hunting spot, or a sacred far-away area only visited on special occasions. Their territory and the health of their territory and resources are fundamental to their spiritual, cultural and physical survival.

Over the last two decades, the Achuar of the Pastaza have been working to secure land titles to their territory from the Peruvian government. The two principal Achuar federations of the Pastaza, who share a communal vision of integral territory, hold titles to only 38 percent of their ancestral territory. However a large area of their land claim is under government control. The discrepancy stems from erroneous, and often patronizing notions of land usage on the part of the government, wherein areas used by the Achuar for subsistence and cultural purposes may be perceived as unused, and even unproductive lands. In fact, the Peruvian government has already granted all of the Achuar’s ancestral territory to petroleum companies eager to initiate extraction operations—with oil leases granted over untitled and titled lands.

While the government claims to respect the rights of native peoples, what they do in practice is quite the opposite. Despite being a signatory to international instruments like ILO Convention 169 and the recent UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Peruvian government has granted oil and gas contracts over some 74 percent of Peru’s Amazon rainforest despite voiced opposition by local inhabitants. Some of these contract areas even overlap territories of indigenous...
peoples who are living in isolation from national society and whose very life would be in jeopardy.

The Achuar of the Pastaza have a long history of opposing extractive activities that may threaten the health of their people and their environment. They have never consented to oil operations, and are celebrated in having successfully forced out three oil companies over the last fourteen years: ARCO, Burlington Resources and Occidental Petroleum. A Canadian company, Talisman Energy, currently holds the drilling rights to the two contested areas.

For the Achuar, although the names of the companies may change, they all represent the same threat to the security of their territory. In addition to the companies, the Achuar must also confront splinter Achuar organizations that have been propped with the influence and financial support of the oil companies.

The Achuar have declared an alternative vision of development for their people, one that is sustainable, peaceful and firmly rooted in securing the health of their territory, livelihoods, and culture for generations to come. Through peaceful actions, the Achuar are forcing oil companies out of their territory through creative acts of peaceful civil disobedience and continued declarations at their community assemblies.

Moreover, the Achuar are currently engaged in a legal process for recognition of their ancestral territorial rights. In conjunction with two Peruvian organizations, Shinai and Racimos de Ungurahui, the Achuar have been preparing maps to illustrate boundaries of their ancestral territory and their economic and traditional patterns of land and resource use. The goal is to present these documents to both the Peruvian government and international bodies, and ask for the entirety of their ancestral lands to be recognized as Achuar territory.

The Achuar seek to control their territory and their own development path as a people, not as divided individual communities. Whether the Achuar win recognition under existing legislation or through the creation of new legislation, in their shamanic ceremonies, the Achuar elders have already had visions of the future when their entire territory will be legally recognized. It is this vision that guides the Achuar people.
Heading deep into Achuar territory in the Peruvian Amazon. A sense of moving further and further away—distance, time, thousands of years of history. All of us, somehow, go back to the very beginnings of things—connected in our blood, brains and bones. This forest!

You awake at dawn on the Marañon, a huge muddy river—a glistening plate of water stretched wide, snaking between the strained, exhausted forest. The high muddy banks; the gasoline; exhaust; piles of logs; small markets; shipwrecked wood; the silhouettes of commerce; old, dug-out canoes.

After days of boat travel, you enter the Corrientes River—the ancestral territory of the Achuar. The river thins and shallows. The forest grows greener and taller along the banks. The corrugated metal sheet roofs of the settler communities shade into palm thatched huts of the Achuar. You are overcome with a great sense of remoteness—and also, overcome with the sense that because of this remoteness, something terrible has happened here.

It is morning now. Boiled yucca and plantain. The early sounds of village life mingling with the natural world; the beautiful, inconstant sound of birds and crickets and big leaves. A sense that the forest is paying more attention to you than you to it. A mysterious, creeping fog lifts slowly through the canopy and then finally is burned away by the strong tropical sun. Your mind: a mixture of serenity and sadness. The stories from last night sit heavily on your heart—the tales of oil company ruin told with such strength, such humility, such hurt. First it was Occidental Petroleum. The wells sunk in the early 70s. All of the toxic waste. The daily affronts to dignity. The sick children. The new diseases. The oily fish. The scaring away of game. The roads and heavy machinery. The ending of the world as they once knew it.

Oxy is gone now. Other companies have moved into the region. The great, undying promise of oil! The painful contradiction of it all! Over the last four decades, by contaminating rivers, scaring prey, building roads, cutting trees, introducing money and new diseases, the oil companies have turned billions of dollars in profit—yes, they have strengthened their own position by harming the forests and its peoples.

But then, even with all of this—moments of profound disillusionment and despair—there is hope and beauty. As the great powerful interests of civilization mount against the Achuar and the Amazon—as governments, business, banks, media, and us (in our cars and planes, consuming heaps of rubbish) align ourselves (knowingly or unknowingly) against them—there is something profoundly moving in the spirit of the Achuar. You sense that even with everything that has been done, the Achuar are the holders of great wells and reservoirs of strength and fortitude and dignity. Yes, there is hope.

In the midst of great destruction we must always continue to build. Despite everything, we must go on. The world is full of great beauty, and it is worth fighting for.
Like a hydra, the logic of neo-liberal “free trade” is hard to kill. International social movements have struggled to slay the idea once and for all, skewering the hemisphere-wide Free Trade Area of the Americas and other proposals. New heads continue to grow, however, taking shape in recent bi-lateral agreements between the U.S. and individual countries.

For Colombia’s President Alvaro Uribe, passage of free trade agreements (FTA) is a top priority. Anticipating the terms of an U.S.-Colombia FTA, President Uribe has carried out sweeping legal “reforms,” including gutting many environmental and indigenous rights safeguards, to make the country more competitive and attractive to investors. If all goes according to plan, Colombia will serve up its bountiful riches to international investors on a golden platter.

Oil, coal and agrifuel production are expanding at a tremendous rate. In Washington, D.C., President Uribe recently stated his goal of expanding oil drilling by ten-fold in the coming years. The stage is being set for increasing (and increasingly violent) social conflict with indigenous communities, most of which reject resource exploitation on their territories.

The case of the U’wa community is as emblematic today as a decade ago. Although a successful international campaign forced Occidental Petroleum to renounce plans for drilling on U’wa lands in 2002, the state-run Ecopetrol has taken their place. Year after year, the U’wa continue to emphasize their vehement opposition to any drilling on their land. They have rejected the government’s “consultation” process, believing that the outcome is pre-determined, regardless of the U’wa position rejecting any drilling in their ancestral territories.

In the mean time, Ecopetrol has been given a green light to move forward by the government. In a recent statement to prospective international investors, the company claimed to respect the consultation process with indigenous groups. For years, however, Ecopetrol has been quietly planning to expand its operations into the heart of U’wa territory.

In a frightening development, presence of armed groups on U’wa territory has increased over the course of 2008. Greater presence of illegal insurgent groups has provided the military a rationale for further militarization of the U’wa reservation. U’wa leaders believe that this is part of a strategy to attempt to force them to accept oil activities—by division, intimidation and potentially by violence.

What will prevail: the government’s imperative to aggressively expand oil production or the U’wa’s firm position of their territory free of oil exploitation and associated armed conflict?

The fight over the FTA raises an analogous question about the rights of investors versus the rights of local communities. In a recent statement, the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia criticized the Uribe administration’s failure to respect internationally recognized rights of Indigenous Peoples: “The Colombian state denies our basic rights: the right to have demilitarized territories, the right of indigenous peoples to manage the natural resources in their territories, and the right to free, prior, and informed consent.”

Colombian government spin to the contrary, passage of the Colombia Free Trade Agreement would aggravate this situation. Amazon Watch invites you to join the broad-based social movement in standing with the U’wa and opposing the Colombia FTA as well as the “free trade” model as a whole.
A one-hour flight northeast from Lima will take you to Peru’s central rainforest region in Pucallpa, and a dusty 20-minute moto-taxi ride from Pucallpa will take you to the tiny town of Yarinacocha—home of the Escuela Senen Soi, a dynamic training school by and for indigenous leaders. Senen Soi was the Shipibo name of one of Peru’s prominent young indigenous leaders, Kruger Pacaya, whose life was cut short four years ago in a transit accident. Kruger was witness to and an avid critic of the impacts of brazen illegal logging in his rainforest home. He had attended a training program in Ecuador focused on teaching the skills and knowledge needed to protect human rights and the environment, and wanted to replicate this model in Peru. And that he did. Inspired by Kruger, this past May marked the second year of the Escuela Senen Soi.

This training program is unique in the region, not only because it was founded and is managed by indigenous leaders, but because it responds to an urgent need in the Amazon—the need to curtail aggressive oil, logging, mining, and other extractive activities that are encroaching on native communities who depend on the forests for their survival. In this way, the school follows the adage of teaching a man to fish, because it is at the village level that community members will confront company workers carrying work permits granted by back-door deals made in Lima and it will be at the village level that communities will need to take actions to protect their rights, their forests and their livelihoods.

Sixty emerging Amazonian leaders have participated in the month-long intensive program. Those who were chosen to take part in the training have the support of their communities and the full expectation that they will impart their new knowledge, skills and contacts with the rest of the community on their return. Through trainings facilitated by national and international experts, and by sharing their own experiences, these participants have gained technical and analytical skills in assessing the social and cultural impacts of extractive industries, and in mounting campaigns for their rights and territories. In a practical sense, they have learned how to communicate their message using video cameras and the internet. They have learned how to reach the media and how to be their own media. They have learned what their collective rights are as indigenous peoples and what legal instruments to use in their defense. They have forged strategic contacts and long-lasting networks. Furthermore, they have learned to map power structures and find creative ways to transform them through organizing.

In Their Own Words

Like one elder says: when we native peoples lift our voices—in our own defense—upon hearing those raised voices, the lakes, the rivers, the forests, the Earth, they applaud us. The large caimans are happy because our voice is loud, because it is heard by all of nature.

— Néstor Paiva Cauper, Senen Soi 2007 Participant

But neither power, ideology, nor the state are static or monolithic. There is a continuous process of resistance and challenge by the less powerful and marginalized sections of society, resulting in various degrees of change in the structure of power. When these challenges become strong and extensive enough, they can result in the total transformation of a power structure.

— Srilatha Batliwala, ASPBAE/FAO

How You Can Help

Indigenous peoples’ stewardship and leadership is key to protecting the forests and the communities therein. This work is critical and it needs our financial support. Please contact andrew@amazonwatch.org to find out how you can sponsor one or more indigenous leaders for the 2009 Amazon School training program.
The Goldman Environmental Prize salutes Luis Yanza, recipient of the 2008 Prize for his struggle for justice in the Amazon.

www.goldmanprize.org

AMAZON WATCH

AMnesty International celebrates
and our collaborations to protect & support indigenous people through shareholder activism & community organizing!

www.amnestyusa.org/business

We’re honored to partner with Amazon Watch in preserving the rainforest and its indigenous peoples.

The Center for Environmental Health proudly salutes the leaders at Amazon Watch for their breakthrough social and environmental justice work.

CEH protects people from toxic chemicals and promotes business products and practices that are safe for public health and the environment.

Learn more at www.ceh.org

Join the global movement for healthy rivers and human rights. internationalrivers.org/action
RAINFOREST ACTION NETWORK
Celebrates AMAZON WATCH
Defending the Amazon Since 1996

Join RAN this January on a delegation to the heart of the Amazon to see first-hand how soy and Big Agribusiness are contributing to its destruction. Details at ran.org/amazon09.

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urubamba region of the Peruvian Amazon.

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VIEW THE INSPIRING FILM
EARTH SPIRIT ACTION
by Ruth Rosenhek

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6jCpChUxOw
(or visit Youtube and key in ‘Earth Spirit Action’)

featuring Vandana Shiva, Starhawk, Ruth Rosenhek,
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in a fast moving discussion of the change that
needs to take place for a sustainable future.
Wal-Mart Watch congratulates Amazon Watch for its efforts on corporate accountability, especially for its Clean Up Ecuador Campaign.
Earth Island Institute
extends our appreciation to
Amazon Watch
for your vital efforts protecting the rich biodiversity of the Amazon basin in partnership with the region’s indigenous peoples.
“No, no and no — we won’t sell our lands.” The Maya people of Jujuy, Guatemala protest large-scale metal mining.

Congratulations to Amazon Watch for another year of amazing work!

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NISGUA works with Guatemalan communities to defend their rights, cultures and natural resources.

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We congratulate Amazon Watch on 12 years of great
work for the planet.
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Amazon Watch and the Frente de Defensa de la Amazonia are honored to receive the 2008 BENNY Award for our Clean Up Ecuador Campaign

AMAZON WATCH
RAINFOREST DELEGATION

Voyage with us, deep into the heart of the Ecuadorian Amazon

Explore the remote and threatened Yasuni National Park, which scientists say “may well be the single most biodiverse forest on earth.” Witness remote villages afflicted by the toxic contamination from three decades of reckless oil exploration and extraction. 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!

For more details, contact Paul Paz y Miño at 415.487.9600 or send e-mail to: paz@amazonwatch.org
Amazon Watch by the Numbers

$800,000: The amount Amazon Watch has contributed to Amazonian partner organizations in small capacity-building and equipment grants since 1999.

81 percent: The proportion of Amazon Watch’s budget that was spent directly on program services and funds to groups in the Amazon in 2007.

10 people: Amazon Watch’s staff.

$876,759: Amazon Watch's total 2007 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.

$16 billion: Amount that a court-appointed independent expert proposed Chevron pay to compensate for the environmental contamination it caused to Ecuador’s Amazon rainforest.

$34.6 million: The total compensation, including stock options, of Chevron CEO David O’Reilly in 2007 alone.

4,000: The number of plant species thought to be in Ecuador’s Yasuni National Park.

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

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

4,453 square miles: The area of the Brazilian Amazon deforested during 2007.

228 percent: The increase in the destruction of the Brazilian Amazon in August compared with the same month in 2007.

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

80 percent: The amount of CO2 we must globally reduce by 2050 in order to stabilize our global climate.

600 million tons: The amount of carbon emissions released by deforestation in the Amazon last year, nearly double emissions from U.S. automobiles.