

PETROLEUM IN PERU 2001

1. DECLARATION OF AIDECOS AND ADECOP IN REGARD TO THE PETROLEUM SPILL IN SAN JOSÉ DE SARAMURO

On 3 October, the petroleum company Pluspetrol experienced a crude oil spill of 5,500 barrels, which represents 264,000 gallons. To date, this oil spill in Saramuro, Marañon River, has not been dealt with adequately.

This fact has affected the river's waters, the Cocama-Cocamilla and riparian populations, and the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve. Given the indifference shown by some authorities, the communication media and investigators, the indigenous community Cocama-Cocamilla, organized in Aidecos (Indigenous Conservation Association of Samiria) and Adecop (Development Association of Pacaya) declared, in regard to the spill, solidarity with the following institutions: Parish of Santa Rita de Castilla, Formabiap (Program for the Training of Bilingual Teachers) Aidesap Central (Indigenous Development Association of the Peruvian Jungle), Municipality of Parinari, and Orai (Aidesep Regional Office, Iquitos).

The communiqué was in the following terms:

"We ask for the solidarity of all social organizations, ecologists and other professionals interested in Amazonia and of the population in general with the indigenous community Cocama-Cocamilla. This community is the only one who can testify and contribute to knowledge about human adaptation in an "bajial" ecosystem. In this natural environment, the activities of appropriation and transformation developed by the people to satisfy their needs rotate around the variation the rising and fall of the river. These events mark the seasons of the year, regulate the annual cycle of plant and animal life and the possibilities for the subsistence of human beings. It isn't surprising, then, that fishing is the principal activity elaborated by the men, and that the Cocama are recognized by the Loreto population as great fishermen or "fisgas" of the Amazonia.

Beyond the environmental contamination, the spill has affected the Cocama-Cocamilla and riparian communities socially. In indigenous beliefs, water represents an unlimited resource, always available, without restrictions of usage. We are not accustomed to restrict it in the preparation of our food, for cleaning, or for recreation. We also are worried about our symbolic world, for the yacurunas and for the mother of the fishes, mui watsu, the "large viper," that inhabit the bottom of the waters and continuously travel about the rivers.

We protest the services of water apportionments and medical attention given by Pluspetrol. The company gave inadequate water apportionment to the affected population. There were two types of water distribution: one by way of drum canisters and the other by way of a barge. With an urban criteria, they delivered to each family a 20 liter drum each week, without taking into account that each had an average of 10 individuals. The distribution by barges took place recently after 15 days of the spill, and the people didn't use the water for consumption because of its bad taste and smell. It seems that the barge that supplied that water had been recently painted. The donation of medicines and medical service was insufficient taking into account the size of the affected population. The company only contracted three doctors to work in San José de Saramuro, Santa Rita de Castilla, and San Regís.

We protest the cynicism of the company that now asks that each affected community sign a letter thanking it for the "donations" that it makes in the zone. It is evident that Pluspetrol takes advantage of the economic conditions in which the people live.

To date, Pluspetrol has handled the "cleaning" of the crude in a relative manner. It has not considered the cleaning of the heavy elements contained in the crude and their sedimentation to the bottom of the river. Nor has it appreciated the respective degradation of the land, that is to say the cleaning of the beaches and shores where the crude has adhered itself (with the imminent rising of the river this crude will penetrate the interior of the reserve). Its work is slow, already there is crude in Orillas del Marañón, and is negligent, in that at some sites crude burns on the beaches or is buried in the banks at a depth of 40 cm.

The population that collects the crude doesn't have adequate technology for the work and smears itself with risks to its health in exchange for a wage of 18 Sols a day. Neither Pluspetrol nor the state show seriousness in regard to the problem of the safety of the riparian citizen.

We ask that an impartial and qualified institution conduct a diagnostic on the current and future impact of the spill of 5,500 barrels of crude. In regard to health, the damage is clear: the people have diarrhea, headaches and skin problems. The population knows that it is in a critical situation and is worried. Despite the declarations of Pluspetrol and the State that "there isn't any damage" and that the "river is clean," the people are dismayed because the fish have disappeared from the affected zone and there isn't "mijano," a fact that demonstrates the contamination of the waters. This is serious given the importance of fishing in providing proteins for the riparian population.

So as to prevent a recurrence of this event, we demand maximum control of the barges that transport crude through the Amazonia. It is incredible that up until now the authorities have not ordered Pluspetrol to retrieve the remains sunken in the

Marañón, although it is known to contain crude. In the future, this could cause new ravages to the aquatic ecosystem of the Marañón.

We alert the Peruvian population to the fact that 20% of the extraction of gas from Camisea will be under the charge of Pluspetrol, transnational corporation that is demonstrating itself to be irresponsible and does not consider the natural environment important.

We ask ourselves why the Port Authority of Iquitos, as guilty of this ecological disaster as Pluspetrol, hasn't assumed its responsibility in the matter, given that barge BZ 346, responsible for the disaster, is the property of Ofopeco, the civilian company of the Peruvian navy. Why has this institution permitted one of its barges to provide this type of service without minimum conditions of guarantee?

Finally, we demand respect for our lands and solicit that Pluspetrol immediately leave the Pacaya-Samiria National Reserve.

For the following reasons: to date, they have not demonstrated responsibility in the extraction of petroleum. This is evidenced in two palpable facts that are the contaminations of bodies of water. In 1999, the contamination of the Chambira River was detected, effecting our Urarina indigenous brothers, and in the present with have the crude spill in our waters of San José de Saramuro. And to finalize, the indigenous community of Cocama that has inhabited this zone for a millenium demands that the company leave its lands and its waters. As an aquatic society, it has been affected in its very heart, at the base of its sustenance and of its spiritual world.

Iquitos, 9 November, 2000

Adiemos Adecop

Note: any pronouncement of solidarity can be directed to Miguel Manihuari Tamani - President of Adiemos and to Nelson Arimuya Murayari - President of Adecop by e-mail at: ppsgrupo@rail.org.pe

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- A boat carrying some 7,000 barrels of crude oil for Pluspetrol, the Argentine-owned firm that is Peru's biggest oil group, spilled a "considerable" amount of oil into a river in the northern Peruvian jungle, the government said on Wednesday.

"It is not yet possible to determine the volume of oil spilled into the River Marañon since part of the 7,000 barrels being transported on the vessel had been transferred to another boat," the Energy and Mines Ministry said in a statement. But it said that "the information we have suggests it is a considerable quantity of crude."

It said the spill occurred around 6 a.m. (1100 GMT) on Tuesday and may have been triggered by a collision. The Marañon is a tributary of the Amazon and the area is remote and largely unspoiled. Pluspetrol said in a separate statement the company "has begun a contingency plan envisaged in such cases." It gave no details and did not say how much oil had been spilled.

Pluspetrol operates in Peru's Lote 8 oilfield in the department of Loreto, some 810 km (506 miles) northeast of Lima, the Peruvian capital. The ministry said there were no immediate reports of injuries in the incident. Peru produces an average of 101,000 barrels of crude a day. Pluspetrol, Argentina's third-biggest gas producer, is also part of a consortium which won a development contract for the huge Camisea natural gas field in Peru's southern jungle.

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