

PETROLEUM IN ARGENTINA 2002

1. SERIOUS DENOUNCMET BY MAPUCHE COMMUNITIES

Rolando Cherqui, of the community Kaxipayiñ of Loma de la Lata in the province of Neuquén, Argentina, has reported that he and his partner have suffered serious consequences of hydrocarbon contamination.

His wife is pregnant, and the fetus of six months does not have a head. Other animals in the same locality are born with similar problems.

The lawyers representing the Mapuches of Loma de la Lata demand that the court of the province of Neuquen authorize the interruption of Rolando Cherqui's wife's pregnancy, because of the headless fetus growing in her belly. Rolando Gabriel Cherqui is 28 years old and is the son of the "lonco" of the community of Kaxipayiñ. Rolando is one of the community members who, according to distinct analyses, has the largest quantity of heavy metals in his organism.

The Mapuches relate the deformed 6-month old fetus directly to the pollution affecting the area due to hydrocarbon exploitation in Loma de la Lata, where the oil company Repsol-YPF is operating. They believe that the "anencephaly" (the scientific definition of the malformation) is due to the pollution that has affected the father of the child, and demand an abortion be authorized, and the fetus preserved in order to carry out a series of genetic studies that will determine the cause of the deformation.

Rolando Cherqui's wife is "criolla" and is 17 years old. Her identity is being withheld. "This is a horrible situation that follows similar experiences with animals in the community. To think that this is all happening, that it affects us, is terrible", sustained the director of the Coordination of Organizations Mapuches (COM), Verónica Huilipán.

The directive stated that, "three and a half years ago, several livestock were born deformed. Goats with no heads were born, or with ears on their body, as well as other horrible malformations that were repeated last December when a pig gave birth to ten pigs with no heads and no feet.

She explained that Rolando Cherqui's wife found out about her fetus "when she had her first ultrasound done." From that moment, there "was panic" in the community because "this goes beyond anything else, this is horrific", assured Huilipán, who commented that in the last few years, young women have been having "spontaneous abortions", in the community of Paynemil, neighbor of the Kaxipayiñ.

"This had never happened before, and is registered in the report that a German consultant carried out (Umweltschutz Nord)", she added. With the support of the legal study by their lawyers Mariano Mansilla and Hernán Milton Kees, the COM demanded judicial authorization to interrupt the pregnancy with a programmed abortion, seeing as that a creature with anencephaly has no possibility of surviving, as well as risks to the mother in advanced stages of the pregnancy.

The report by the radiology doctor who carried out the ultrasound is conclusive: "good vitality signs and cardiac activity present. The age of gestation (...) is 18 weeks and five days. The medulla ends in a group of bones at the base of the cranium, with no cranial cavity", describes José Oscar Pfaff, who carried out the analysis of the images.

The request is now in the hands of the judge of the Family Isabel Kohon, in charge of Tribunal 2 in the city of Neuquén.

"What we want right now is the interruption of the pregnancy as soon as possible. First, for the health of the girl. After this, with the conservation of the fetus, we will be able to submit it to genetic studies, but this is a very delicate theme", concreted the lawyer Milton Kees, on the people involved in the Mansilla study.

Kees commented that there is a series of Neuquén professionals working on the theme. "What we know up until now is that a deformation of this type could have various causes; it could be due to lack of folic acid, smoking, drugs or contamination. For us, it is clear who is the suspect", said Kees.

The Mapuche communities of Kaxipayiñ and Paynemil live in Loma de la Lata on an important portion of the hydrocarbon deposit that the company Repsol-YPF is exploiting.

The relationship between the company and the Mapuches (the Cherqui and the Paynemil), has been weak for a long time. The Mapuches accuse the firm of contaminating the air, water and soil, in other words, the environment.

The accusations are fundamentally supported in a report that was developed in 1996 by the sub-secretary of Health in the province, which proved the existence of an excess of lead and other heavy metals in the blood of community members, especially in Paynemil. Because of this report, the persona in defense of the Minors, Nara Osés, ordered the province to provide mineral water to community members indefinitely.

In this moment, an excess of gasoline was also found just below the hamlet of the Paynemil.

Long before this incident, the communities that have been strengthened in the strategies of struggling, have encountered conflicts of distinct scenes. In the

middle, is a demand for 500 million dollars, which the Mapuche formalized a few months ago, on the basis of the report requested by the aboriginals, which the Argentina affiliate to the German Umweltschutz Nord carried out.

Repsol-YPF underestimated the denouncements on more than one occasion, giving support in clean-up studies ordered by specialists that the FIEL contracted. Meanwhile, the communities keep living their lives in the same place that is tainted with contamination, and with very little potable water. They live on the same land that is contaminated with heavy metals. They don't have the time that "justice" demands, they don't understand the technical terms that the company gives them when in needs to make another excuse, and the government does not help, especially since they are in charge of forming these managers. They simply resist; and they die.

Source: *RESISTANCE OILWATCH NETWORK BULLETIN Number 31 – August 2002*

2. CONFIRMATION OF FUEL SPILL IN PORT IGUAZÚ PORT IGUAZÚ (TD).

Almost a thousand liters of fuel was spilled when a tanker truck broke one of its 11 locks broke, while it was maneuvering in the area of the local port. The official conformation was made yesterday, when the leader of the Prefecture Iguazú, Edgardo Maldonado, ratified the versions that were circling with instance for days.

The incident occurred approximately two weeks ago, but only recently were the facts made known to the public. According to information from official sources, on Thursday, June 13 a truck that transported gasoil from Posadas, arrived at Port Iguazú to unload its fuel onto a Paraguayan boat. Around 2:00 p.m, while the truck was maneuvering around the lower area of the port, one of the tank pipes broke, allowing 980 liters of gasoil to escape.

The leader of the local Prefecture indicated that the corresponding measures where taken, using elements such as lime and sand to avoid water coming in contact with the contaminating liquid. "Gasoil is very volatile, which is why we consider that it is very unlikely that there will be significant damage to the environment", Maldonado expressed, reminding that "Port Iguazú is habilitated for all types of burdens, which is why we (the Prefecture) cannot impede that certain types of merchandise not be permitted to operate there".

a) Disinformation

The incident also took the local delegate for the Ministry of Ecology, Marino Mircovik, by surprise, who affirmed that he did not know of the incident through official channels, but through the versions that were circulating. The functionary indicated that fuel had already been unloaded there three times, all of it destined for Paraguay.

The administration of the local port is in the hands of the municipality, since jurisdiction had been transferred from the province. But municipal functionaries did not know of the incident. The secretary of the local government, Angel Nieva, was consulted on the theme, and said that he had not known about the operations that were being carried out at the port, and that the companies who use these services do not pay for this service.

With respect to the oil spill, Nieva has classified it as a "serious call to attention, and that we should be working in all aspects that are related to the functioning of the port ". The functionary also added that up until now there does not exist a special contingency mechanism to counteract the consequences of accidents such as the one that occurred fifteen days ago.

Source: *RESISTANCE OILWATCH NETWORK BULLETIN Number 31 – August 2002*