

RESISTANCE OILWATCH

COLOMBIA 2002

1. TESTIMONY OF A CITIZEN OF CAÑO LIMÓN, COLOMBIA (PART ONE)

"Fourteen years ago, the company OXY entered the Caño Limón region. The sector of Caño Limón at the time of the entrance of OXY was part of the Laguna de Lipa forest reserve. Seismic prospecting was conducted in the entire area of the reserve, without legal permission from the government. What they always asserted was that the permission or the license was in transaction.

Lipa lake is located in the region of intersection of the Araucan savannahs and the foothills of the eastern Colombian range. It is part of an ecosystem with a very fragile ecotone, but with a high, rich and diverse ecological productivity. The alimentation for the entire fish population of the general spawning of the Arauca river basin grows there. The destruction by the the company breaks this food chain.

When the perforation and exploitation projects began, the zone was inhabited by the Guahíbo indigenous community, neighbor of the U'wa. The consequence of the petroleum complex's enclave in the lake zone was the extinction of this indigenous community in Arauca state, along with the destruction of the natural habitat of the aquatic species found in estuaries, streams, and gallery forest in an area slightly larger than 6 thousand hectares. This destruction included the species of fish that were the source of alimentation for the Arauca community.

There was also the extinction of many species of wildlife such as deer, chigüire, lapa, and armadillos, as well as many species of birds such as herons, ducks, birds of prey and semiaquatic birds such as babillas, caymans, turtles, etc. These species disappeared because the multinational corporation destroyed their ecological niche with highly toxic production waters loaded with heavy metals and toxic substances, which were dumped directly into the lake. _

Due to the petroleum boom in the zone, many colonists come to the lake zone looking for sources of employment. The need for wood in these locations causes the loss of many species of gallery forests and foothills, such as the ceibatorúa, cedars, pardillos, etc., wood of high commercial value, as well as species of protective and medicinal value and of alimentary use.

The construction of the Saravena-Araucita-Arauca highway impeded the flow of waters that maintained physical and chemical conveyances and that permitted the survival of animal and plant species of the zone, and destroyed, above all due to

change in the oxygen content of the water, the decomposition of organic material and the ambient temperature, which was modified because the water flow was disrupted.

Source: *RESISTANCE OILWATCH NETWORK BULLETIN Number 12 –January 2002*

2.FROM VIETNAM TO THE AMAZON. THE OTHER ENERGY SCANDAL OF HARKEN PETRÓLEO, SQUADRONES OF DEATH AND CORRUPTION IN COLOMBIA

Financial irregularities in Harken Energy during the Bush administration in the oil company in Texas have dominated headlines in the past few days. But the press has ignored a much bigger scandal: how Harken Energy benefited from war and terror in Colombia.

George W. Bush went to work for Harken Energy in 1986 when the company bought Spectrum 7, a company that had previously purchased the oil company Arbusto, Bush's failed company. Harken gave Bush 2 million dollars in options, a job as councilor for 122,000 dollars per year, and a seat on the board of directors.

While Bush worked for Harken, Rodrigo Villamizar, an old friend Bush had known at a student association party in 1972, became the director of the office of Mines and Minerals in Colombia, the ministry that supervises the sale of oil concessions by the state oil company ECOPETROL. According to a report in December 2001 in Counterpunch, Bush had helped Villamizar in the 1970s, getting him a job on the committee for Economic Development of the Senate of the State of Texas, and afterwards a seat on the Commission of Public Services of the State. At the end of Bush's period in Harken, Villamizar returned the favor by granting Harken a series of oil contracts in Colombia.

The majority of the oil contracts were for the Magdalena Valley. The majority of oil companies that operated in the region accepted tactfully or actively looked for protection from these death squads. A 1996 report by Human Rights Watch documented the fact that Colombian military armed and supported these groups, under CIA orientation, who integrated them in their intelligence networks. The close cooperation between military and paramilitary continues today and is usually more uncontrolled in areas where there is a lot of oil production. The State Department positioned paramilitaries in terrorist organizations, but looked the other way when the Colombia army "financed by the U.S.A." continued their support in order to carry out the dirty work in their war against the dissidents. Harken is still active in the Magdalena Valley, thanks in part to financing from the World Bank International Finances Corporation, and the paramilitaries continue to terrorize all who threaten their corporative interests in the region.

No one claims that President Bush personally ordered paramilitaries to kill farmers and intimidate syndicate leaders in order to improve Harken's results. But at the same time, considering his close links with Villamizar, and the fact that his father was President in that era, it is highly improbable that Bush has ignored aspects of human rights related to oil exploration in Colombia.

All of this has a very immediate relevance at the moment because Villamizar, who abandoned Colombia to escape accusations of corruption and who is now a fugitive convict, developed the Colombian policy for the Bush campaign in 2000, and continues to maintain close relations with the President. Couterpunch informed that Villamizar, who should be completing his four-year sentence in a Colombian prison, was Bush's first selection for the position of Joint Secretary of the State for Issue in the Western Hemisphere, but that he refused the position.

Villamizar's recommendations for the expansion of U.S.A. military support to Colombia has been widely accepted by the Bush administration, and a new president in Colombia, with links to the death squadrons, to use more U.S.A. military support in order to dramatically scale-up the forty-year civil war in the country against leftist guerrillas. Hundreds of military councilors in the U.S.A are now found in Colombian territory. Officially, they do not participate in combat, but it is probable that this will change when the guerrillas begin to treat the councilors as military objectives.

The cornerstone of Bush's new military aid package is a subsidy of 98 million dollars to help the Colombian government to establish a new battalion of the 18th Brigade in its army to protect an oil pipeline against guerrilla attacks. The 18th Brigade has a long history of links with the paramilitaries, and their own history of civil attacks. During this year, soldiers killed a teenager for walking too closely to the oil pipeline. Ironically, the first beneficiary of this program will be Occidental Petroleum, the company that helped Gore make his fortune. But the ambassador to the United States, Anne Patterson, has said that in the long run, the Pentagon is considering similar programs for other economic areas that are crucial to Colombia. This would probably include oil pipeline maintained by Harken subsidiaries, Global Energy Development, a gas pipeline operated by Enron, and projects that involve Dick Cheney's old company, Haliburton, as well as property goods used by Texaco, Exxon-Mobil, y BP.

The conflicts of interest in the Bush administration in Colombia should be investigated, denounced and exhaustively examined, before the United States is dragged even further into the bloodbath in Colombia.

July 12, 2002

Sean Donahue is co-director of New Hampshire Peace Action and has written and spoken extensively on

United States politics in Colombia. He is available for interviews and conferences.

His email address is:

worldhealer@yahoo.com.

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

3. COLOMBIAN U'WA INDIANS BRACE FOR NEW BATTLE

CUBARA, Colombia, July 8 (Reuters) - Roberto Perez chews a cluster of dry coca leaves as he stands near a precipice overlooking a valley of rain forest and swift rivers.

Legend has it that Perez's U'wa Indian ancestors jumped to their deaths from a similar ridge 500 years ago to avoid enslavement by Spanish conquistadors. Perez, a shy and mild-mannered U'wa leader, says his people will not commit mass suicide this time, but warns they will do whatever it takes to defend their land from the latest "intrusion" -- a planned U.S. aid package to train an army battalion.

The \$98 million in aid is aimed at preparing Colombian forces to protect an oil pipeline that runs near U'wa territory from attacks by Marxist rebels, but tribal leaders fear it will spread Colombia's 38-year-old war across their land.

The U'wa, an impoverished semi-nomadic indigenous group in northeastern Colombia, gained international attention two years ago when they fought a protracted battle against Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum, that sought to drill next to their reservation.

Occidental withdrew from the project this year after failing to find commercially viable oil deposits. The controversy had been a public relations nightmare for the U.S. company as vociferous international environmental organizations cast the dispute as a David versus Goliath struggle between indigenous groups and corporate power.

Now U'wa leaders fear Washington's plan, which is being discussed in the U.S. Congress, could drag them into a military conflict that kills thousands of people every year.

"We have our own law. The army and the rebels should respect us. We don't want them on our land," said Roberto Cobarria, an U'wa leader with a wispy mustache.

International green groups are bracing for a new battle. "Our campaign is not over. We campaign for the indigenous groups' right to selfdetermination, be that against oil or U.S. military aid," said Kevin Koenig, a spokesman for Amazon Watch, a group based in Oakland, California, that has taken up the U'wa cause.

a) 'THINKING PEOPLE' SUFFER DISCRIMINATION

The U'wa, which means "the thinking people" in their language, are one of Colombia's 80 indigenous ethnic groups. For centuries they have suffered oppression and discrimination at the hands of Spanish colonisers and Colombian government.

Their numbers have dwindled dramatically -- to 5,000 from 20,000 in 1940. They live in remote mistshrouded mountains, having lost large parts of their ancestral land to government expropriations and incursions by displaced peasants fleeing the violence of the country's largely rural war. Near Cubara, the main town on the tribe's reservation, children with stomachs swollen from malnutrition sat in the dirt in one settlement of mud huts inside the reservation. There is no electricity or running water. One girl, barely 15, breast-fed two babies as scrawny chickens pecked around pools of rain water. Inside a smoky hut, elders gathered around a wood fire and drank "chicha," a traditional beer made of fermented maize.

Most didn't speak Spanish and seemed suspicious of foreigners. The lifestyle of most U'wa has changed little in 500 years although tribe leaders have set up a campaign office in Cubara equipped with telephones and fax machines. The leaders live in the town, and dress in the same shirts and trousers as other country Colombians.

b) WRATH OF GOD

The U'wa, a firmly religious people, believe that exploiting their sacred rivers and forests would unleash the wrath of "Sira" (God).

They regard oil as the "blood of Mother Earth" and say drilling is like "stabbing a knife into your stomach." They carry coca leaves -- the raw material for cocaine -- in gourds around their necks and chew them to "gain strength and wisdom."

The land dispute with Occidental entered the U.S. presidential election in 2000 as environmental groups criticised Democratic candidate Al Gore for owning company shares. When Occidental won a court order to sink a test well after a seven-year legal wrangle, Colombian soldiers were deployed near the reservation and military helicopters hovered in the skies to prevent protesters from blocking the drilling.

Word that the U'wa were considering walking off the 1,400-foot (400-metre) "Cliff of Death" to fight the "invaders" as they did against the Spanish caused a media frenzy even though the U'wa later ruled out such drastic action.

"The collective suicide was something our ancestors did 500 years ago to avoid becoming slaves. We are going to fight until the end to defend our land but we are not thinking of jumping off the cliff," said Perez, 60, who has 10 children.

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