

*U.S. lawyer who sued Chevron
over Ecuador pollution faces
charges*



Attorney Steven Donziger is on trial in federal court in New York City in the United States

New York, May 11 (RHC)-- A disbarred American lawyer who spent more than two decades battling Chevron Corp over pollution in the Ecuadorian rainforest attempted on Monday to fend off criminal contempt charges stemming from a lawsuit against him by the energy company.

Steven Donziger is on trial in federal court in New York City in the United States for failing to turn over his computer, phones and other electronic devices and refusing court orders to surrender his passport in the civil case brought by Chevron.

In an opening statement, prosecuting lawyer Rita Glavin said that Donziger had consciously chosen to disobey court orders to turn over his devices and documents. “Choices have consequences,” she said.

Martin Garbus, arguing for Donziger, painted a different picture, saying the court had not initially been clear about what it wanted the lawyer to hand over. The case is the latest twist in a long-running battle stemming from Donziger’s representation of villagers in Ecuador’s Lago Agrio region who sought to hold Chevron liable for water and soil contamination in the jungle between 1964 and 1992.

Chevron has said Texaco, which was acquired by Chevron, cleaned up the pollution, and that state-owned Petroecuador was mainly responsible for the contamination. In 2011, Donziger won a \$9.5 billion judgement against Chevron in an Ecuadorian court. Later that year, the US company sued Donziger in Manhattan federal court, claiming he and his associates pressured the presiding judge in Ecuador.

U.S. District Judge Lewis Kaplan in 2014 ruled in favour of Chevron, saying the Ecuadorian judgement had been secured through bribery, fraud and extortion.

Chevron sought to recoup money Donziger reaped as a result of the judgement, and Donziger was ordered to turn over certain electronic devices to the company’s forensic experts. When he refused, Kaplan charged him with criminal contempt.

Attorney Steven Donziger has said the charges violate his rights to due process under the U.S. Constitution. The Harvard-trained lawyer was disbarred by a state appeals court in New York last year.

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