

Nobel Peace Prize Winner to Visit Ecuador and Unmask Chevron



Quito, June 3 (teleSUR-RHC)-- The Nobel Peace Prize winner and internationally renowned indigenous rights activist Rigoberta Menchu will pay an official visit to Ecuador's Amazon region of *Lago Agrio*, which was affected by the United States-based oil company Chevron-Texaco.

The Ecuadorean Foreign Ministry said Tuesday that Menchu would be on a visit to Pozo Aguarico 4 oil well, located in Lago Agrio, to show the world the truth about the damage the company had inflicted on the communities there as part of their oil exploration.

Menchu's visit comes little more than a month after she had participated in a demonstration in Washington DC along with thousands of activists and supporters of the victims of Chevron's contamination in the Ecuadorean Amazon. The protest took place in front of the International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) in the U.S. capital.

"We cannot allow Chevron's impunity, which has devastating consequences, including the sovereignty of Ecuador," had said Menchu. "We are going to seek justice wherever we can find it ... Chevron now wants to become the victim. That is the biggest cynicism we have ever heard in our efforts to defend our mother

earth. Chevron was responsible for massive contamination in Ecuador and committing ecocide."

Oil company Texaco — which merged with Chevron in 2001 — is accused of causing one of the world's greatest environmental disasters as a result of its oil exploration in the area between the years 1964 and 1990.

In what activists have dubbed the "Amazonian Chernobyl," thousands have died from a cancer spike believed to be caused by the pollution of the soil and water supplies in the Ecuadorean Amazon where Chevron-Texaco was operating.

In 2011, after a two-decade legal conflict, an Ecuadorian judge ordered Chevron-Texaco to pay \$18 billion to the indigenous peoples affected by the company's oil spills and dumping of toxic waste while it operated in the region. Later on, a high court upheld the sentence, but reduced the figure to \$9.5 billion.

However, Chevron-Texaco refused to abide by the rulings claiming that it had met the environmental regulations ordered by the state until it closed its operations in Ecuador. The Ecuadorian government has since complained that the oil-industry giant was carrying out a smear campaign against the country and its justice, and thus launched the campaign "The dirty hands of Chevron" to inform the world about the environmental catastrophe caused by the company in the Amazon.

In March, the International Court of Justice (CIJ) ruled that a prior ruling by an Ecuadorean court that fined the U.S.-based oil company Chevron \$9.5 billion in 2011 should be upheld.

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