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Ecuador Accuses Chevron of Contaminating 5 Million m3 of Land

31/07/2014



Ecuador whose justice department condemned Chevron enterprise to pay 9.500 million dollars for ecological damages, accused on Wednesday the oil company for contaminating five million m3 of land, the North American company refused to pay the fine.

The "polluted places regarding the quality of the soil could be around five million cubic meters. We are speaking of a large extent of land, two counties: Orellana and Sucumbíos (East) are affected", affirmed the Minister of Environment, Lorena Tapia to AFP.

She asserted that Ecuador quantifies the environmental damage caused by Texaco, acquired by Chevron in 2001 and that operated in the Amazon forest between 1964 and 1990.

The company opened around 1.000 wells and ditches where 64 millions liters of raw oil and 71 million liters of residuals were carelessly deposited without any attempt to avoid contamination, said last May the Ecuadorian chancellor, Ricardo Patiño.

He added that Chevron has not completed the commitment of cleaning up 264 waste pools. But, the transnational company declared that they had fulfilled the repairing and that the contamination accusation pending on them was schemed by the state enterprise Petroecuador, a former working partner in the country.

The transnational also denied on Wednesday the alleged massively contaminated land in Ecuador. "Any environmental issue existing in the region (Amazon) at present is a sole responsibility of the Ecuadorian government and its oil state company", spoke to AFP in Miami the spokesman for Latin America of Chevron, James Craig.

He added that "this entire media circus (...) pursues to evade the responsibility of Ecuadorian authorities before their own people and their own environment."

Craig aimed that Chevron "carried out its environmental repair required by law under contract with the Ecuadorian State".

"We will continue to calculate affectations in water, air, soil, besides the social damage as in health", said Tapia who also rejected the "slandering" actions undertaken by the oil company against her country.

The Ecuador ambassador in Washington, Nathalie Cely, said on Wednesday in Quito that "the attacks Ecuador suffers are not aimed at the image of the government (...) they are truly aiming at the image of the institutions, they affect the climate of business and affects all Ecuadorians."

The government of President Rafael Correa promotes the campaign "Chevron's dirty hand", through which personalities and artists are extended an invitation to visit the area where there are residuals left by Chevron.

Quito performs a separate study from the sentence passed by the national justice department against the Oil Company, which considers the verdict illegitimate and attempts that the Ecuadorian State assumes the payment of the compensation to indigenous and Amazon peasants through a trial at The Hague.

Besides, the verdict of a judge in New York found fraudulent evidence and corruption in the process against the oil company, which was appealed, if it were ratified it would prevent Ecuadorians to charge the millionaire compensation in the United States, since Chevron has no assets in Ecuador.

"We are confident and hope that in the end the truth will come through and the world will understand that Chevron holds no responsibility for the problems existing today in Ecuador", said Craig.

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