

OCCIDENTAL PETROLEUM IN COLOMBIA

- Occidental Petroleum, based in Los Angeles, California, claims responsibility for having “transformed Colombia from oil importer to exporter with the 1983 discovery of the billion-barrel plus Caño Limón oil field.”ⁱ Oxy’s exploitation of this oil field over more than twenty years has earned the company hundreds of millions of dollars, provided significant funding to the Colombian government, and attracted massive US military aid to Arauca, the department in which Caño Limón is located.
- Oxy’s presence has also transformed the area into a war zone, where workers, *campesinos*, indigenous communities, and the environment are caught in the crossfire between leftist rebel groups intent on driving Oxy out of the country and the rightwing paramilitaries and Colombian armed forces who defend the company’s interests.
- While Oxy has maintained that it “has not and does not provide lethal aid” to the groups it relies on to defend its Caño Limón-Coveñas oil pipeline, the corporation has been implicated in the 1998 deaths of seventeen civilians who were killed by a US-made cluster bomb that the Colombian Air Force dropped, allegedly with logistical support from a security firm that had worked for Oxy.ⁱⁱ In 2000, Colombian riot police broke up a nonviolent protest by the indigenous U’wa against Oxy’s plans to drill on their land, leading to the drowning deaths of three children.ⁱⁱⁱ Occidental Petroleum has not been held responsible in any way for either of these tragedies.
- The leftwing rebel groups ELN and FARC have repeatedly kidnapped and murdered Occidental’s employees in efforts to weaken the Colombian government and expel Oxy from Arauca.^{iv} They have also bombed the Caño Limón-Coveñas pipeline over 950 times since 1986, and resulting oil leakage has caused severe environmental damage.^v
- Oxy has played an active role in fanning the flames of this conflict by lobbying intensively for increased US military aid to the region. The United States has dedicated hundreds of millions of dollars as well as US Special Forces personnel to train and equip the Colombian Army’s XVIII Brigade to protect the Caño Limón pipeline from guerrilla attacks.^{vi} Oxy itself has also reportedly financed and supported the Brigade directly. The XVIII Brigade’s extremely poor human rights record and involvement in recent abuses, including the killing of three trade union leaders in 2004, make its close collaboration with Oxy a cause for serious concern.^{vii}
- Paramilitary groups in Arauca continue to victimize indigenous groups, trade unionists, and social activists who have consistently opposed Oxy’s exploitation of Colombia’s people and natural resources.
- Workers in the United States, whose tax dollars directly subsidize the defense of Oxy’s business in Colombia, have been familiar with the company’s anti-union tactics for years. In 1994, for example, Oxy shut down a Belle, West Virginia chemical plant after workers voted for representation by the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers Union.^{viii}

- Oxy has also shown disregard for the environment and the rights of indigenous peoples in the United States, as in its 1998 purchase of the Elk Hills Naval Petroleum Reserve, ancestral lands of the Kitanemuk and Yowlumne Tejon Indians, despite protest by these groups and the Sierra Club.^{ix}

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Amazon Watch - <http://www.amazonwatch.org/>

Amnesty International Report on Arauca (2004) - <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR23/004/2004/en/dom-AMR230042004en.pdf>

Colombia Support Network - <http://colombiasupport.net/>

SINALTRAINAL (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Industria de Alimentos) - <http://www.sinaltrainal.org/>

Solidarity Center Colombia Report (2006) - <http://www.solidaritycenter.org/files/ColombiaFinal.pdf>

Witness for Peace - <http://www.witnessforpeace.org/>

REFERENCES

ⁱ Occidental Petroleum, http://www.oxy.com/oil_gas/world_ops/latin_america/colo.htm

ⁱⁱ Occidental Petroleum, http://www.irconnect.com/oxy/pages/news_releases.html?d=39470

Amnesty International, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR23/004/2004/en/dom-AMR230042004en.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/colombia/corporate.html#1>

^{iv} <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR23/004/2004/en/dom-AMR230042004en.pdf>

^v “Securing pipelines requires planning and equipment.” Pipeline & Gas Journal, March 1, 2007

^{vi} <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR23/004/2004/en/dom-AMR230042004en.pdf>

^{vii} Witness for Peace, http://www.witnessforpeace.org/pdf/Col_Multinationals_factsheet.pdf

^{viii} “OxyChem closing Belle Operation ; 71 Workers out of Jobs.” Charleston Gazette, October 7, 1994

^{ix} “Judge Rejects Request for Injunction in Elk Hill sale.” The Associated Press, February 4, 1998