

North to South, the Oil Monster Meets Resistance

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
27 February 2009

From the front lines of fighting off the beast of Big Oil, we are cheered by the Nigerian youth's "demand to keep our oil under as our contribution to the global fight to addressing climate change." And the Alberta tar-sand exploitation could be derailed.

Ogoni youths warn against Shell resumption

by Jimitota Onoyume

Feb. 26, 2009

PORT HARCOURT — To avert conflict in Ogoni, the Federal Government has been told not to allow Shell Oil to resume operation in the area as anything contrary would spark off crisis in Ogoni land.

Youths who spoke under the aegis of Ogoni Solidarity Forum-Nigeria after a joint meeting with Social Action community resource centre, Bori and Environmental Rights Action, said government should first take practical steps to heal the wounds of people of the area.

They recalled that it was agitation for compensation from Shell for its oil exploration in the area that largely resulted in the death of some of Ogoni's brightest leaders.

Lamenting the loss of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others, the youths said government should take steps to implement the Ogoni bill of right as a way to assuage the pains of the people.

"No good would come out from the purported re-entry of Shell into Ogoni, we resolve as follows. The Federal Government should advise itself on the impropriety of its deceptive attempt to bring Shell to Ogoni through the back door.

"The tendency by the Federal Government and Shell to commodify the misery of the people by offering perverse incentives to a few will only lead to the breakdown of peace prevailing in Ogoni and other communities in the Niger Delta.

That peace, stability and development in the last 13 years without oil related conflicts insist that our oil be left in the ground.

"The Federal Government and Shell meet the minimum demands of the Ogoni people as listed earlier. Federal Government and Shell should see our demand to keep our oil under as our contribution to the global fight to addressing climate change.

"That the conviction of murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other innocent Ogoni leaders be quashed and apologies made to our people.

"We resist the criminalization of our just struggles by the government and the oil multinationals."

vanguardngr.com

remembersarowiwa.com

Thumbnail photo of Niger River Delta oil fire by Ed Kashi

Norway: Stanch your thirst for oil - protect Lofoten and Vesterålen!

This is from a global group to protect the unique marine areas outside Lofoten and Vesterålen on the scenic coast of Northern Norway.

The two areas are, according to the international oil companies, among "the most promising on the Norwegian shelf." Estimates are they hold \$60 billion USD worth of oil below the seabed. There is currently massive pressure on the Norwegian government to open this area up for oil exploration, at the expense of the bio-diversity of the North Sea, the fisheries, the tourism industry of the area, the tradition in the region for a sustainable and nature-friendly way of life.

And not to forget: The climate.

Lofoten and Vesterålen are home to the world's largest cod and herring stocks, shoals of sperm whales and killer whales, some of the largest sea bird colonies in Europe, including puffin and cormorant, and the world's biggest cold water coral reef. The area is known for its unique fisheries, rugged landscape and wildlife, attracting thousands of tourists every year.

A decision is due to be made during 2010. This is the big trial for the "green-minded" Norwegian government. International pressure is crucial for protecting this region! Norway promotes itself as being a responsible nation in the forefront of environmental issues. The country built a huge fortune on export of oil and gas. Being one of the richest nations in the world in terms of GDP per capita, the country can and should afford to put nature and future generations first!

Lofoten and Vesterålen deserve to be permanently protected.

Spread the word!

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Indigenous people in legal challenge against oil firms over tar sand project

Canada's Beaver Lake Cree Nation group say their traditional way of life is being devastated by the rush to extract oil from vast tar sand fields

By Juliette Jowit, guardian.co.uk, Feb. 26, 2009

British oil firms are facing a legal battle over exploitation of the huge Canadian tar sand fields with indigenous people who claim the industry is ruining their traditional lands.

The Co-operative Bank will announce today that it is to fund a legal challenge by the Beaver Lake Cree Nation, which claims the boom in tar sands extraction is destroying their hunting and fishing lands.

The court challenge calls for an injunction to stop more than 16,000 permits issued by the Alberta state government and, if successful, could dramatically reduce or even stop what has been described as a modern day "gold rush" for the oil, spurred by the expectation of high long-term oil prices.

Last year the International Energy Agency estimated that the amount of oil in tar sands and other "unconventional" sources, especially in Canada and Venezuela, was 1-2tn barrels, only slightly less than the remaining conventional oil sources. Companies involved include Shell, BP, ConocoPhillips and Total.

Visiting London this week to highlight the case, the Beaver Lake Chief Al Lameman said they had taken action after evidence began to emerge that caribou, elk, moose, deer and other animals were disappearing and infected with diseases, fish stocks were damaged by pollution in the water, and plants used for traditional medicine were under threat.

A study funded by the US-based Natural Resources Defense Council estimated more than 160m migratory birds could die early over the next 30-50 years because of disturbance of migratory grounds and pollution. There have also been claims of an increase in human health problems.

"The impacts are very, very devastating sometimes," he said. "We refer to the earth as our mother, the mother of all things."

The census records 922 Beaver Lake Cree people, of which about half live on the reserve. Most of them regularly hunt, fish for winter food supplies and gather medicinal plants, said Jack Woodward, the indigenous peoples' rights lawyer who is handling the case. "People tend to think first nation [indigenous peoples] culture is dying off and gone, and it's not," he added.

The case rests on a treaty signed in 1876 under which the Beaver Lake Cree gave up their ownership of huge areas of land, in return for a guarantee that "as long as the sun shines, the rivers flow and the grass grows, we can continue our traditional way of life", including "traditional rights to hunt, fish, trap and gather for food and support". However another clause in the treaty excluded land that may "be required or taken up for settlement, mining, lumbering or other purposes."

In 2007, Woodward helped win a landmark ruling in the British Columbia Supreme Court that the provincial government had overstepped its authority in granting land-use rights to companies without the approval of the local Tsilhqot'in first nation. He said the precedent should help the case against Alberta, which was originally lodged in May 2008.

A spokesman for the Alberta state government said: "The province has not yet filed a statement of defence, although the intent is to rigorously defend ... this lawsuit." He noted the economic benefits of tar sand exploitation, saying that between 2000-2008 an estimated CAN\$87bn (\$7bn) was invested in oil sands projects in Alberta, that and every dollar invested in the oil sands creates about \$6 worth of economic activity in Alberta and another \$3 elsewhere.

The Co-operative Bank has offered the Beaver Lake Cree nation £50,000 initially and more funding if necessary in future. Paul Monaghan, head of social goals and sustainability for Co-operative Financial Services, said the company wanted to help fight the legal battle and publicise the problem internationally.

If the Beaver Lake case is successful, other indigenous groups could also mount legal challenges and oil companies could be hit with potentially "massive investment damages", said Monaghan. "In addition to the ecological devastation, the extraction and production of these fuels emits between three and eight times more carbon dioxide than conventional oils," he added. "If unchallenged, this trend risks making attempts to avoid dangerous levels of climate change almost impossible."

In the Beaver Lake area, future extraction might not stop altogether, but would be much more tightly controlled "to the point it is not a danger any more", said Lameman. "What we want is control over what's happening on it."

Related article by James Hansen, celebrated climate scientist:

Obama's Tar Sand Trap:

The tar sands of Canada constitute a deadly threat to our planet. The US and Canada must agree not to develop them
February 20, 2009 by The Guardian/UK

[Culture Change readers may notice that Hansen is a bit like Obama in placing major importance on continuing the making of and the use of cars, as if doing without them is fanciful. - JL]

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Editor's note: As a well-known and trusted oil-industry analyst for my first long career ending in 1988, it is with all due consideration for the state of the world and human consciousness that I refer to the oil industry as a monster. But it should be understood that almost no modern citizen is blameless, as we consume our Earth as if it were a technology factory pumping out "progress." Culture Change's message is not to point a finger at "the bad guy," but rather to show the way to a sustainable, just society by pulling the plug on our needless global-warming petroleum dependence. - JL

Resource:

oilwatch.org

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