



PRESS RELEASE

(for immediate release – Tuesday 28 September 2010)

Business & Human Rights Resource Centre launches online hub: “Human rights impacts of oil pollution: U.S. Gulf Coast, Ecuador, Nigeria”

Today the non-profit Business & Human Rights Resource Centre launched a special online information hub on the human rights impacts of oil pollution in the U.S. Gulf Coast, Ecuador, and Nigeria:

www.business-humanrights.org/Documents/Oilpollution

Christopher Avery, Director of Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, said:

“Massive oil spills create human rights disasters as well as environmental catastrophes. As media coverage of the Gulf spill subsides, and people in the Niger Delta and eastern Ecuador continue to live in the midst of decades of oil pollution, we decided the time was right to create a platform that keeps an ongoing focus on the human rights impacts.”

The new portal impartially presents reports, articles and videos from all sides. What are the victims, advocates, companies and commentators saying? Are the abuses continuing? Are past abuses being addressed? Are steps being taken to prevent further spills? Do victims have effective remedies? What is the latest news about lawsuits and compensation claims?

The Ecuador and Nigeria briefings include articles raising concern that the impacts of oil pollution in those countries have received very little attention and remedial action in comparison with the U.S. Gulf Coast spill. For example, a July 2010 *Agence France-Presse* report commented:

“An oil spill may be a rare disaster off the coast of the U.S., but here in the Niger Delta, they stopped keeping count long ago...It’s an ecological disaster, but rarely makes the headlines.”

Human rights impacts:

“We are a subsistence community. We have been here for centuries...We make our living from the harvest of the waterways and this is also where we get our food that we eat. The oil spill has the potential to imperil all of us.”

Rosina Philippe, Atakapa-Ishak Tribe, Grand Bayou Village, Louisiana, in “Oil Spill Threatens Native American ‘Water’ Village”, *National Geographic*, 8 Jun 2010

“We had absolutely no idea what was going to happen the day we filmed with the Quichuar people in Ecuador...They were angry with the oil companies for polluting their lands and ruining their lives. After they showed us around, we could see why. Several large pits full of oil and toxic waste are scattered throughout their land. They told us that toxic substances from these pits regularly flow into their water supply and have also polluted the food chain, which the Quichuar rely on for their survival. All this has made them sick, they said, and very, very angry. After standing next to one of the pits for a short while I began to feel dizzy. The smell was overpowering and my stomach churned...What it must be like to live there, with the fear of contamination ever-present, I can’t even begin to imagine.”

“Filming with the Quichuar in the Ecuadorian Rainforest – The Curse of Oil: Producers’ Diary”, Rebecca John, *BBC*, Jun 2005

“It kills our fish, destroys our skin, spoils our streams, we cannot drink. I have no livelihood left.”

Saturday Pirri, palm wine tapper, village of Kpor, Niger Delta, in “Nigeria: ‘World oil pollution capital’”, Caroline Duffield, *BBC News*, 15 Jun 2010

The human rights impacts of oil pollution may include displacement, loss of livelihoods, damage to physical health, damage to mental health, abuses of cultural rights, differential access of various ethnic groups to remedies, workplace deaths and injuries, and alleged complicity in the ill-treatment or killing of protesters. Internationally-recognised human rights standards relating to each of these impacts are included in the portal.

The companies covered in the briefings are:

- a) **U.S. Gulf Coast:** BP, Anadarko Petroleum, Cameron International, Halliburton, MOEX Offshore (part of Mitsui Oil Exploration), Nalco, Transocean
- b) **Ecuador:** Chevron and Texaco (now owned by Chevron), Petroecuador
- c) **Nigeria:** Shell, Chevron, Eni, ExxonMobil, Total, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)

Before launching the new portal, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre invited each of those companies to contribute any further information or statements they wished to send.

The portal includes links to reports about Ecuador and Nigeria tracked by the Resource Centre over many years of contact with affected people and their representatives, and with companies operating in those countries. NGOs and companies have sent reports over the years to, respectively, the Centre's Head of Latin America (Mauricio Lazala, a Colombian national based in the UK) and Anglophone Africa Researcher (Abiola Okpechi, a Nigerian national based in South Africa). Resource Centre staff travelled to the U.S. Gulf Coast in July 2010 to collect information from a number of affected communities, from BP, and from health, environmental and human rights experts. Greg Regaignon, the Centre's Head of Research, commented:

"Among others, we met BP representatives, and Native American, African American, Vietnamese American and Croatian American fishing communities whose livelihoods were impacted by the spill. In addition to collecting reports about a range of widely-reported concerns, we received many reports about the spill's impact on mental health."

The right to mental health is a human rights issue that rarely receives the attention it deserves. Dr. Arwen Podesta, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, remarked in July 2010:

"I have seen a new group of people coming into mental health in-patient hospitals for treatment since the beginning of the oil disaster. The new cases I have seen include fishermen and others with jobs on boats, seeking treatment for substance abuse, severe depression, anxiety and a host of other mental health problems; some are suicidal... The available mental health infrastructure is simply insufficient to treat all those who need it."

The purpose of the briefings is to keep an ongoing focus on these important issues, and to provide a platform to reflect the continuing public debate.

All three briefings – U.S. Gulf Coast, Ecuador and Nigeria – will be kept updated over the coming months and years. Any company, organization or commentator wishing to submit a clarification, response or further information is welcome to do so – see contact details below. When concerns are raised about the human rights impacts of a company, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre invites the company to provide a public response to the allegations. This allows companies to put forward their views, and encourages companies to address important concerns being raised by civil society.

In coming years the Resource Centre will consider expanding this information hub to cover oil pollution in other countries.

[Business & Human Rights Resource Centre](#) tracks the human rights impacts (positive & negative) of 5000 companies in over 180 countries. The site is updated hourly and receives 1.5 million hits per month.

Mary Robinson chairs its 80-member International Advisory Network. Its 20 Academic Partners include leading institutes in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America.

For further information about the Resource Centre, see the ["About us"](#) section of the website.

If you have questions about this new portal, or would like to submit further information for the portal, please contact:

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See the Resource Centre website for [contact details](#) of our UK and US offices, and of researchers based in India, Senegal, South Africa and Ukraine.

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