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### **Peruvian Amazon: the Kichwa people of the Tigre River mobilize to protect their territory from oil companies**

During the last three decades, oil companies have polluted the northern half of the Tigre River basin. Oil now smears the rainforest and contaminates rivers and lakes in this isolated part of the Peruvian Amazon. According to the local Kichwa people, oil spills occur regularly due to ageing and poorly maintained pipelines.

The Peruvian government has done little to remedy this situation; on the contrary, it has just sold two new concessions to the American oil company Conoco Phillips. Oil-related activities will now extend over the entire Tigre River basin, an area equivalent to Maine and New Hampshire combined, which is almost entirely covered in rainforest.

Some four thousand Kichwa Indians live in the area, and they depend on hunting and fishing for a large part of their sustenance. Until now, they have received no external support to counter the environmental destruction wrought by oil companies.

Thanks to a small grant from the Marion Institute (\$7,559), FECONAT, the federation of Kichwa Indians of the Tigre River, has started implementing its own program of environmental monitoring. Following the example of the Achuar people in the nearby Corrientes River basin -- who also benefited from a small grant from the Marion Institute -- FECONAT is training and equipping a group of six indigenous monitors to inform and sensitize their communities to environmental and human rights issues and to document and denounce illegal activities in the region. When the monitors identify an oil spill, for example, they document it with their digital camera and their GPS and send this information to the federation's office in Iquitos. There, an indigenous coordinator presents the case to governmental agencies and to the oil company responsible for damages, and also publicizes the case, in view of obtaining reparation for damages and a change in the company's practices.

Currently, the project is in its initial phase. The six monitors recently followed their first training course in Iquitos. In 2010, FECONAT will make this work operative. The project's annual budget is US\$ 15,000.

The world's oil consumers can thank the Kichwa Indians. Through their acts of constructive resistance, they are trying to make oil producers accountable.



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