

Amazon Watch

For Immediate Release/January 15, 2008

Contact: Karen Hinton/703-757-0601 or Mitch Anderson/415-342-4783

Chevron's Amazon Disaster Lands at Sundance

Joe Berlinger's "Crude" Shows David v. Goliath Legal Battle to Hold Oil Giant Accountable for Destroying Rainforest

Trudie Styler and Sting Join Indigenous Leaders at Opening Jan. 18

San Francisco, CA (January 15, 2008) – A new documentary by the acclaimed filmmaker Joe Berlinger (director of *BROTHER'S KEEPER*, *PARADISE LOST*, and *METALLICA: SOME KIND OF MONSTER*), which portrays the epic 15-year legal battle between indigenous tribes and oil giant Chevron over massive oil contamination in Ecuador's Amazon, will premiere at the Sundance Film Festival on January 18th.

The film, titled *Crude*, was produced and directed by Berlinger and shot by Berlinger, producer/second unit director Michael Bonfiglio, and a film crew of Ecuadorians during the time the case was on trial in Ecuador's Amazon region at the request of Chevron. It documents the travails of a team of young lawyers and activists, including Pablo Fajardo (CNN Hero Award winner) and Luis Yanza (Goldman Environmental Award), as they take on one of the world's largest oil companies over what experts believe is the worst oil-related contamination on earth.

A co-production of Entendre Films, Netflix, Radical Media, and Third Eye Motion Picture Company, *Crude* has been invited to a number of international film festivals and will be released theatrically later this year. Alyse Spiegel is the editor, Juan Diego Perez is the director of photography, and Pocho Alvarez is the cinematographer. Perez and Alvarez are from Ecuador.

The trial documented by Berlinger is nearing an end, with Chevron facing a potential \$27 billion damages claim that would be enforceable in the United States, according to lawyers for the plaintiffs. The amount of damages was determined by an independent, court-appointed expert who relied primarily on Chevron's own scientific data to draw his conclusions.

If the court accepts the damages assessment, Chevron could be hit with the largest judgment ever in an environmental lawsuit.

Trudie Styler and Sting, who are shown in the film helping to provide clean water to the Amazon residents through the Rainforest Foundation and UNICEF, will attend the premiere along with several Ecuadorians. Also attending will be leaders from Amazon Watch, an American environmental organization that works with the affected Amazon communities.

Selected as one of the 16 finalists at Sundance out of 879 submissions in the documentary category, *Crude* is described by the Sundance Committee as the “inside story of the ‘Amazon Chernobyl’ case in the rainforest of Ecuador”. The Committee says *Crude* “makes a concerted effort to show the case from all sides: from the scientists and lawyers employed by Chevron, to Ecuadoran judges, to celebrity activists and humanitarian organizers, to the role of the media, to the dramatic intervention of Rafael Correa himself, the first Ecuadoran president to sympathize with the indigenous perspective.”

The lawsuit, initially filed in the U.S. in 1993, charges that Texaco deliberately dumped more than 18 billion gallons of waste water into Amazon waterways and abandoned more than 900 unlined waste pits filled with oil sludge. Five indigenous groups in the area – the Cofan, Secoya, Siona, Huaronai, and Kichwa -- say the contamination left by Texaco has decimated their traditional lifestyles and caused an outbreak of cancer and other health problems never before seen in the rainforest.

Chevron, which bought Texaco in 2001 and assumed defense of the case, now says Petroecuador, Ecuador’s state-owned oil company that took over Texaco’s fields, is responsible for the damage. Those claims have been rejected by the plaintiffs and the court-appointed expert, and two Chevron lawyers are under indictment in Ecuador for lying about a purported clean-up designed to secure a legal release from Ecuador’s government.

Chevron’s contamination also has captured the attention of the U.S. Congress and President-elect Barack Obama. Congressman Jim McGovern (D-MA), the House Co-Chairman of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, spent time touring the area in November with his congressional staff. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and then-Senator Obama asked the Bush Administration in 2005 to reject efforts by Chevron to undermine the case via a lobbying campaign in Washington.

Shortly after his recent trip to tour the disaster, Congressman McGovern wrote President-Elect Obama, requesting that relevant federal agencies provide technical assistance and other resources to bolster efforts by the government of Ecuador to clean up the contamination.

#