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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-2103

<http://www.mcgovern.house.gov>

November 17, 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
President-Elect of the United States

Dear Mr. President-Elect:

I just returned from a trip to Ecuador. I witnessed firsthand the terrible humanitarian and environmental crisis that has resulted from the decades-long failure to properly clean the contamination left by oil drilling and production. Specifically, the sites I visited were those that were under the control of Texaco, now Chevron. As an American citizen, the degradation and contamination left behind by this U.S. company in a poor part of the world made me angry and ashamed.

I visited "oil pits" that were poorly constructed; poorly remediated; or remediated not at all. This has left a toxic legacy for poor *campesinos* and indigenous peoples. I also saw the infrastructure Texaco/Chevron created that allowed for the wholesale dumping of formation water and other highly toxic materials directly into the Amazon and its waters.

The drinking water for thousands of poor people is horribly unfit – even deadly. Children are drinking and bathing in water that reeks of oil. In one village, San Carlos, I couldn't come across a family that hadn't been touched by cancer. Mothers brought their children to show me the terrible rashes and sores that covered their bodies. At an oil well site known as Yuca-4, I talked with a farmer who lost many head of cattle because of the polluted water near the site and its pits – robbing his family of what little food and assets they had.

As you know, a lawsuit has been filed against Chevron by 30,000 Amazon residents demanding that the company accept responsibility for substandard production practices and help with the clean-up efforts. Chevron, for its part, asserts that it was released from responsibility in the 1990s by PetroEcuador, including claims by third parties; the release remains in legal dispute.

I don't know how the legal case will be remedied; and the purpose of this letter is not to ask you or your Administration to get involved in a legal matter that should be decided in a court of law. But as the years pass and nothing is done, the situation on the ground becomes more desperate for thousands of poor people – and the pollution spreads deeper into the soil, the water, and the Amazon basin. These people and their environment need help now.

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There are currently some efforts by Ecuador's national oil company, Petro-Ecuador, to remediate a handful of contaminated sites. However, experts on environmental clean-up initiatives have suggested that these efforts are not at all adequate.

Mr. President-Elect, in your campaign you spoke eloquently about "a planet in peril" – and the need for us to be better stewards of our precious environment. I am writing to ask for your global leadership on this peril so we can do what is right for our planet and for a great many good and decent people who have been invisible to the powers that be for too long.

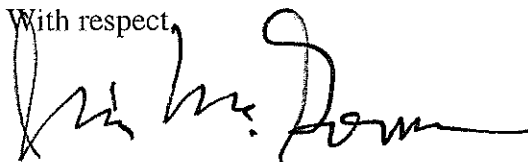
I am asking that you make this issue a priority for your Administration; that you task those relevant departments and agencies to utilize their technical assistance and other resources, working with the Ecuadorian government and affected communities, to design a plan to help fix this awful situation. And, finally, it is past time for those responsible for this contamination to step up to the plate and be held accountable.

I would welcome any opportunity to meet with you or your key advisors to discuss this crisis and how we might move forward to address it.

I was deeply moved by my visit to Ecuador. I will never forget the courageous people who told me their stories and asked for my help. They deserve to live a much better life. I look forward to meeting with you on this.

Thank you for your consideration –

With respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim McGovern". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

JPM:cmb