



## EDITORIAL

Canada is a nation known for many things - soaring mountains, moose, maple syrup. What isn't so well known is that one province, Alberta, sits over one of the largest recoverable oil patches in the world, second only to Saudi Arabia. It covers 149,000 square kilometres, an area larger than Florida, and holds at least 175 billion barrels of recoverable crude bitumen. Canada has become the largest supplier of oil to the U.S., with over a million barrels per day coming from the oil sands.



Oil sands take a lot of energy and a lot of water and leave a very large environmental footprint compared to all other forms of oil extraction. Because of this, the massive changes to the boreal forest and the watershed have prompted the United Nations to list this region as a global hot spot for environmental change. Furthermore, the downstream health effects are yet to be fully understood. Cancer rates among the native communities; particularly in Fort Chipewyan are spiking, 29% above national rates as noted by the provincial health authority. Very few health studies have been done to further investigate effects in other communities or even further down the Athabasca river, and the local doctor who has spoken out was effectively 'muzzled' by Health Canada.



What we are seeing is an insidious encroachment on human rights along with possibly the largest ensuing environmental catastrophe on the planet. Unknown or poorly understood health risks in communities are part of the price being paid for our dependence on oil. It's not the first time that human rights have suffered with environmental abuse - check the status on human rights in the Niger delta. What we need is to adopt more strongly a paradigm where our lives are not dependent on, nor desiring, fossil fuel based

transportation. Not only does the environment win, but also those whose lives are most affected, and sometimes taken, by dirty industrial practices.

**Guest editorial by Stefan Fairweather, Otago University.**

*Image above: Protesters against Alberta Oil*

### **EDeN at the AI annual meeting, 8 May 2010**

EDeN was represented at the Annual Meeting of AIANZ in Christchurch. I presented a short introduction on Human Rights and Environment to a group of approx 20 members. The presentation was put together by Chris Kerr and Amnesty office staff. Other human rights and environmental issues were raised. A member brought up the health issues resulting from the extraction of sour gas in Canada (see guest editorial). In addition, local issues such as the rights to Canterbury water were discussed.

Overall the dominant issue for me coming out of the workshop was the need to undertake more research

and advocacy on the question - “when does an environment issues become a “grave human right abuse”? This is important for Amnesty International as humans dominate the planet more and more. An environmental issue such as mining in a national park can be an abuse on the spiritual/intrinsic values of certain populations, however is it a grave abuse? For some groups, such as indigenous people, it will be a grave abuse if it leads to a physical break down in a community especially in future generations (such as increased poverty, child mortality and premature deaths through pollution etc). The whole matter is complex. EDeN's focus on the Vedanta mining in India and the Porgera gold mine in Papua New Guinea covers this, where governments and mining companies have not adequately cared for the local population. More members signed up with EDeN and it is hoped more will contribute to this discussion.

Kit Howden

## TAKE ACTION

### Nigeria

The AGM of Shell in London in May provided an opportunity for Amnesty UK to run an impressive ad campaign on the major problems with pollution and human rights in the Niger Delta. AIUK booked a full page ad in the Financial Times (FT) on the day of Shell's AGM after fundraising from members. Then the night before the AGM the Financial Times pulled the plug on the ad. This triggered a lot of additional publicity on the issue, and two other London papers stepped in and ran the advert. Also a truck featuring the ad was driven around London's financial district. The action certainly gave Shell's shareholders something to think about.

The massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has deservedly received a great deal of media and political attention, but it is worth remembering that as the oil slick becomes worse than the Exxon Valdez spill of 1989, this amount of oil is spilt **every year** in the Niger Delta – one of the ten most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems in the world.

There are still postcards available for sending to the Nigerian authorities and Shell. If you need larger quantities for events please contact [Chris Kerr](#). Please keep sending the postcards to help maintain the pressure.



### Papua New Guinea

In an update on the forced evictions and police brutality which took place around the Porgera gold mine in the highlands of Papua New Guinea last year, a community group from Porgera say that due to a lack of support from government, they've had to find other ways to hold a mining giant accountable for social and environmental damage in their community. The group of four, including two landowners from the Porgera gold mine lease area, have returned to the country after visiting Canada where they lobbied support to draw more accountability from Canadian mining giant Barrick Gold's operations in their community.

See this Radio NZ international article for more: <http://bit.ly/ckPmA4>.

Resources for taking action on this issue are still available on the [EDeN Website](#).

## India

The official hearing on a challenge to the Indian governments' decision to grant environmental clearance to a Vedanta subsidiary's bauxite mine in Niyamgiri, Orissa, resumed in New Delhi on 10 May.



The hearing is on the petition filed by 23 Dongria Kondh endangered indigenous (adivasi) community members and four Orissa-based social activists against the government decision, on 29 April 2009, to grant environmental clearance to the Orissa Mining Corporation and Vedanta Resources' subsidiary Sterlite Industries India Limited.

A 2009 Amnesty International report detailed human rights violations due to the proposed mine project at Niyamgiri, and Vedanta Aluminium's alumina refinery at nearby Lanjigarh. [\*Don't Mine us out of Existence: Refinery and Bauxite Mine Devastate lives in India\*](#) states that the authorities provided scant or misleading information on the two projects and failed to adequately consult with or obtain the consent of the adivasi communities concerned.

## Climate change

Amnesty International continues to support the development of a long term, fair and just response to climate change, in the wake of the inconclusive and disappointing Copenhagen conference in December.

Visit <http://bit.ly/cBWycw> for more information.

## Want to do more?

We are very interested to hear from you if you would like to take a more active role in EDeN. We would like to expand the co-group to include two or three more people who bring new skills, energy and enthusiasm to our team. We meet every six weeks to plan actions, discuss strategy and coordinate the network. Some areas we are interested in developing are: membership support, utilising social networking sites, event coordination, newsletter editing, policy and strategy.

If you would like to know more please email [eden@amnesty.org.nz](mailto:eden@amnesty.org.nz).

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Links to interesting news articles and websites.

- Article on the Gulf and Niger Delta oil disaster: <http://bit.ly/9RApAc>.
- A film website on the oil sands issue: <http://bit.ly/9Zadg2>.
- Tensions over the waters of the Nile: <http://bit.ly/9ZziGg>.

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- Keep writing letters and sending postcards (if you receive replies to your appeal letters, please forward copies to the AI office).
- Volunteer to attend events as an EDeN member.
- Share with us your specialised skills or knowledge in human rights and the environment.
- More resources are available on the AIANZ website. Keep checking the site [eden.amnesty.org.nz](http://eden.amnesty.org.nz) regularly for more information.

That's all for this edition.

Regards,  
Nick Keenleyside.

*The Environmental Defenders Network (EDeN) is co-ordinated by Kit Howden and Nick Keenleyside in conjunction with Research & Advocacy Co-ordinator Chris Kerr.*

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