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PRESS RELEASE
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Guyanese women move to the courts
to protect their country's environment from ExxonMobil's flaring

Three courageous Guyanese women have filed a case against Guyana's Environmental Protection Agency to put a stop to flaring by ExxonMobil.

Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Ltd, an offshore company wholly owned by ExxonMobil, has been flaring associated gas almost continuously since it began production in December 2019, despite undertaking to reinject the associated gas, not flare it. In May 2021 after ExxonMobil had flared billions of cubic feet of associated gas, the Environmental Protection Agency purported to modify Esso's permit to allow it to flare gas.

The litigants argue that the Agency's decision to modify Esso's environmental permit to allow flaring was irrational and unlawful and that it should be quashed by the Court. They also argue that the Agency breached the Environmental Protection Act Cap 20:05 by purporting to allow Esso to flare in return for paying a fee.

According to Sinikka Henry, a lecturer at the University of Guyana, "ExxonMobil started production in December 2019. In January 2020, we first began to hear from fishermen that ExxonMobil was flaring. ExxonMobil didn't tell us to begin with. Then we heard that they were flaring billions of cubic feet of natural gas. People protested. ExxonMobil told us they had to flare because their gas compressor wasn't working. For more than 2 years ExxonMobil has been using faulty equipment, flaring and making climate change worse and putting toxins into the air."¹

Sherlina Nageer, another litigant on the case, dismissed ExxonMobil's performance,

"Lies, and more lies- that is Exxon's hallmark. They lied to the American people for decades about the reality of climate change and they have lied to the people of Guyana for almost two years now about the amount of flaring going on at their Liza Phase 1 operations." Nageer pointed out that ExxonMobil lobbyist Keith McCoy had confirmed that ExxonMobil spent millions funding groups that denied and discredited climate science.

She also warned about the secrecy and lack of regulation around ExxonMobil's operations,

"The fact is that Guyanese have no way of knowing how much gas is actually being flared by Exxon- not only do we lack the technical capacity to conduct independent verification, we are also hobbled by a government and 'regulators' who care more about short term monetary gains than actually protecting the environment and preventing long term damage;

¹ <https://demerarawaves.com/2020/01/15/exxonmobil-flares-1-2-billion-cubic-feet-of-natural-gas-in-start-up/>
<https://www.kaieteurnewsonline.com/2020/01/17/exxonmobil-flaring-gas-way-longer-than-epa-expected-dr-adams/>
<https://www.stabroeknews.com/2020/05/28/news/guyana/international-environment-group-calls-on-exxon-to-cease-gas-flaring/>
<https://www.ciel.org/news/exxons-gas-flaring-is-latest-sign-that-oil-may-turn-guyana-from-carbon-sink-to-carbon-bomb/>

Flaring is harmful to the environment.² The litigants have asked for orders directing the Agency to provide reports on the amount of gas flared, and the toxins released. They are also asking for an independent and expert investigation into Esso's compliance with manufacturer's standards for operating its gas compressor.

Andriska Thorington, the third litigant, and currently a student at the University of Guyana, urged other young people in Guyana to stand up for themselves,

"As a young person I cannot stand by and watch my future burn up. Young people everywhere are acting to stop oil and gas from destroying the planet. I call on young people in Guyana to question this oil and gas and all the propaganda about jobs and money and benefits. The youth should be mindful of the fact that the purported money and benefits will cease to matter if our environment is destroyed."

The deadly impacts of oil and gas production on the climate and the ocean are evidenced by unchallengeable scientific data. Last year the UN Secretary General Guterres warned that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group 1 report on the physical science basis (the sixth assessment report) was a 'code red' for humanity.³

Yet politicians continue to put profit above people and planet.

According to Sherlina Nageer, "There is simply no political will among Guyanese politicians to hold Exxon accountable. So it's up to we the people- those of us who aren't beholden to oil or money or politricks, who can see the long term planetary picture, the negative effects of extractivism and oil on life, health, and well-being, to take a stand and demand accountability and a change from 'business as usual'.

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women has warned Guyana about the disproportionate impacts of oil and gas on women⁴ stating that they were,

"...concerned, however, that the continuing and expanding extraction of oil and gas in the State party and the resulting greenhouse gas emissions could undermine its obligations to women's empowerment and gender equality, as the resulting environmental degradation and potential natural disasters have a disproportionate impact on women, in particular those in situations of poverty."

Meanwhile ExxonMobil is in financial trouble with shareholders saying that it faces an 'existential business risk' by pinning its future on fossil fuels.⁵

Sinkka Henry, Sherlina Nageer and Andriska Thorington are represented by Attorneys-at-Law Melinda Janki and Ronald Burch-Smith.

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To speak with the legal team: +592 653 6905.

Photos of litigants and lawyers attached separately.

² <https://www.ccacoalition.org/en/news/gas-flaring-has-dangerous-side-effects-these-mitigation-opportunities-could-be-win-everyone>

https://file.scrip.org/Html/15-6201351_20231.htm

³ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20847.doc.htm>

http://www.news.cn/english/2021-10/27/c_1310271147.htm

⁴ <https://www.ciel.org/news/un-institution-warns-guyanas-oil-and-gas-development-threatens-rights-of-women-and-girls/>

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fGUY%2fCO%2f9&Lang=en

⁵ <https://www.ft.com/content/5ab010de-43c8-4b60-80f2-020f01610eee>