



The petroleum civilization at its limits

DECLARATION BY OILWATCH

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1. Despite the economic, environmental and social signs of the urgent and now unavoidable need to move away from dependence on fossil fuels, corporations, the financial system and the world's countries continue to become involved in new oil projects, with the expansion of the exploration and exploitation frontiers and towards non conventional type of hydrocarbons with different mechanisms for control of reserves, including invasions, occupations and a series of shadowy deals.
2. The current intervention in Libya, the threat looming over Syria, and the refusal to give up military control in Iraq and Afghanistan all reflect a continuation of the strategy of military control: "What the American people learned from the Gulf War is that it's a helluva lot easier and a helluva lot more fun to kick ass in the Middle East than it is to make any sacrifices to limit America's dependency on imported crude."¹ "America can do whatever we set our mind to."²
3. The industrialized countries have adopted strategic positions to maintain the current model and profit from the oil industry, whether through oil companies, some state-owned and other private, or through financial investments or related industries, like the automotive or chemical industries.
4. The hegemonic powers, both the new ones like China – which is now arguably a world power – and the old ones that were built on the oil model, depend on the exploration and extraction of fossil fuels and the occupation and control of territories with known oil reserves.
5. It is not difficult to fully grasp the importance and magnitude of hydrocarbons. Modern urban life is petroleum-based: it depends on it for electrical power and transportation, and releases petroleum in its 300 million tons of waste annually. Modern rural life is petroleum-based: it depends on machinery, agrochemicals such as the 136.44 million tons of fertilizers plus millions of tons of insecticides, herbicides, fungicides and other chemicals used annually,³ as well as the transportation of agricultural products. Healthcare and food systems are becoming ever more petroleum-based as food and health

¹ James Schlesinger, former U.S. secretary of energy in the Carter (Democratic) administration, following the 1991 Gulf War.

² U.S. President Barack Obama, May 1, 2011, during the announcement of the death of Osama Bin Laden.

³ FAO, figures from 2000.

sovereignty are increasingly abandoned. In the United States alone, coal is the source of half of all the electrical power generated.

6. Overall energy consumption grew by 5.6% in 2010, with continued dependence on fossil fuels (coal, gas and oil). This was the highest rate of growth since 1973. Energy consumption is growing in every region of the world, and particularly in China.⁴

7. Reserves-to-production ratios (R/P)⁵ indicate that the regions with the world's biggest reserves are Latin America (93.9) and the Middle East (81.9), followed by Africa (35.8) and Asia-Pacific (14.8). All of these reserves are artificially converted into commercial reserves, on the basis of transferring a large part of the extraction costs to national states and ignoring the ecological limitations. This method of ignoring the inherent value and rights of Mother Earth allows the artificial creation of exchange value for the purpose of trading nature.

8. Petro-dependence is maintained through private sector and state strategies that include both direct violence and the indirect violence of advertising bombardment, greenwashing and political corruption. In spite of local opposition, environmental impacts and economic illegalities, and in spite of the general crisis to which it is linked, this strategy is maintained and even imposed as a priority.

9. The financial system is investing like never before in fossil fuels.

Petro-capitalism is expanding and recycling itself

9. The search for fossil fuels remains a national priority based on last century's promises of growth and well-being, ignoring the damages caused by these activities on local populations and on national and worldwide natural heritage.

10. Under the pretext of the national interest, states not only permit these operations but also place themselves at their service, whether by granting contractual benefits, taking on the role of community relations promoters, or offering protection guarantees for extractive projects.

11. Campaigns for the exploration and extraction of more fossil fuels create a situation in which the recognition of collective and environmental rights are critically threatened by extractive policies that require accelerated processes of occupation and plunder.

12. Proposals such as "payment for environmental services", "emissions absorption programmes", "forest conservation programmes", "benefit sharing"⁽¹⁾, extractive enterprises with indigenous participation" and a series of

⁴ BP Statistical Review of World Energy, June 2011 bp.com/statisticalreview

⁵ The reserve portion ([numerator](#)) of the ratio is the amount of a resource known to exist in an area and to be economically recoverable (proved [reserves](#)). The production portion ([denominator](#)) of the ratio is the amount of the resource used in one year at the current rate.

other systems of covert debt-creation and co-optation represent new tools for the occupation and control of territories that facilitate new means of clearing the way for extractive industries, like REDD type projects, that in many cases open a path for extractive industries and are strategies to maintain and expand capitalism, with a green image.

13. Petro-capitalism is not only expanding and pushing the final frontiers, but is also penetrating cultures, fostering phenomena like alcoholism, consumerism, violence against local communities and peoples and individualism that lead to the breakdown of individuals, social relations and practices that stand in its way.

14. Communities that oppose or resist these processes of occupation are condemned, repressed or criminalized. Indigenous peoples and defenders of nature are the new criminals, “enemies of development” and terrorists.⁶

15. In addition, the construction of a new global unit of currency – “carbon” – has created the idea that climate change is the only global problem related to energy consumption, ignoring the destruction of living networks and systems, pollution, accumulation of waste, and diseases that are caused both by extraction and the consumption of derivatives, as well as all of the social and economic impacts that affect if not destroy the ecological stability of societies.

16. Carbon is a new “commodity” that not only contributes to extending the life of petro-capitalism but also to expanding the territories under its control, subjecting the seas, the atmosphere and the forests and even soils to a new form of occupation: conversion into carbon “sinks”.

17. We can add to this the new ecosystems services proposals that will not leave anything out of the market, together with a deep financialization process of all components of nature: water, biodiversity, and cycles and functions of nature.

18. The new technologies: geo-engineering, nanotechnology, synthetic biology among others, are presented as tools to confront climate change but present new threats, conflicts and perpetuate over consumption and over production logic of brutal capitalism.

19. There is a deliberate and purposely created ignorance of energy cycles, which downplays natural cycles like solar power and photosynthesis and denigrates those based on human effort, creativity and innovation, and cultures while promoting partial knowledge of artificial cycles based on the burning of fossil fuels.

Oilwatch proposes placing oil, gas and coal at the centre of discussions

20. Countries and peoples who aspire to break free from domination and seek out their own sovereign paths must confront the fact that petroleum dependence entails enslavement to this domination. Subjecting new territories

⁶ Global Trends 2020 makes it clear that the industry’s biggest concerns are the radicalization of the indigenous movement and control of natural resources.

to the expansion of petro-capitalism restricts the spaces and possibilities for emancipation from its control.

21. Countries and peoples who build international relations based on dignity must break into international forums to dismantle the new strategies of control and domination, which use the environment as a pretext to consolidate anti-ecological proposals, maintain imperial ways of life and perfect new forms of colonialism.

22. The current energy agenda continues to hinder the development of clean, decentralized and low-impact energies, sacrifices food to agrofuels, appropriate rivers to benefit power sectors, promotes the triumphant return of controversial nuclear power, and justifies military and political campaigns to occupy territories with hydrocarbon reserves.

23. The sooner we tackle the energy shift, the greater our opportunities will be. Practices, technologies and activities are needed to promote individual and collective energy autonomy, to restore harmonious and interdependent relationships among food, energy and cultural sovereignty, and to enable the necessary leap from a destructive technological model to the development of constructive productive forces that reposition the human species within the physical and ecological limits of planet Earth.

24. Within local communities there is a wealth of knowledge, practices and capacities related to energy cycles, which represent a genuine exercise of resistance in the face of petro-capitalism. The challenge is to revive this ancestral knowledge, foster innovation, reclaim sustainable technologies and develop vital spaces for cultural and human growth.

25. There are many struggles against the petroleum civilization: the struggle against global warming, struggles for national sovereignty, struggles for peace and against war, struggles against agrochemicals, the resistance struggles of indigenous peoples, struggles against the accumulation of waste, struggles that promote the use of bicycles instead of cars, and perhaps many other struggles we do not know about or are not aware of yet.

26. The world cannot continue to pretend not to know that the use of fossil fuels in energy and other production activities is the major cause of global warming. Rather than skirt about the issue in endless negotiations that end up in the enthronement of false solutions, we call for real action by stemming this path of civilisation.

27. Oilwatch, as a network of resistance against oil industry activities, invites organizations, trade unions, indigenous peoples, intellectuals and thinkers to join us all as part of this process of civilization shift and to share practical experiences and resistance struggles of different kinds, and through these, to sew the stitches that will bring us together under the shelter of a single fabric.

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