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Ecos del Yasuní

Editorial

China, the US, and the Yasuní: the jungle as a site of global dispute

What is happening in Yasuní is not just an environmental issue or a debate about oil. Enormous interests converge there: China, seeking more oil; the United States, wanting to install military bases; and a government trying to look in both directions. But there are also the people, who in the popular referendum gave a clear "yes to life" and decided to leave the oil underground. That decision is not only a triumph for Ecuador, it is a message to the world: in the midst of the climate crisis, defending the Amazon means defending our shared future. Yasuní reminds us that another path beyond extractivism is possible, if we have the courage to make it real.

China is not just any actor. Just a few days ago, the world witnessed a colossal military display with which Beijing made it clear that there is no safe corner from its power. That show was not innocent: every tank, every plane, every missile depends on a constant supply of oil. In this context, the Amazon becomes a cog in a machinery that combines extractivism, militarism, and geopolitics. China has cultivated the strategy of investing wherever there are extractable materials, regardless of ideologies or borders, in order to secure the resources that fuel its expansion.

In Ecuador, this dynamic is tangible. The country has repeatedly tried to expand and consolidate oil agreements with China as a strategic partner. Companies like Sinopec and Andes Petroleum, drawn by favorable contractual frameworks and weak regulations, have expanded their presence

in the provinces of Orellana and Sucumbíos. The goal is clear: to drill 12,000 new wells with an initial investment of 105.55 million dollars—another step deeper into the Amazonian oil frontier.

At the same time, the Ecuadorian government has been negotiating with Power China—parent company of Sinohydro—to end international arbitration over construction failures at the Coca Codo Sinclair hydroelectric plant, and even to potentially hand over the operation of the project. This reveals President Daniel Noboa's interest in strengthening ties with Beijing.

But while tightening relations with China, Noboa also seeks a place under Washington's wing. He has proposed the installation of U.S. military bases in Ecuador and, according to the Financial Times, is part of a bloc of right-wing Latin American leaders —alongside Bukele and Milei—actively seeking to align with Donald Trump to secure investments and shield themselves politically.

Ecuador, then, seems to want both models: more Chinese investment in extractive industries, and at the same time, ceding sovereignty in defense and security to the United States. In this crossroads, Yasuní becomes not only a local or national dispute, but a global geopolitical battleground.

This is a territory whose defense directly challenges the logic of global accumulation: the Amazon rainforest is coveted as an energy prize on a planet in climate crisis, where major powers compete for resources that sustain both their economies and their armies. Saying "no" to extractivism here is to question the very architecture of world power.

Beyond the victory in the referendum that ordered the closure and remediation of Block 43, Yasuní now has the ruling of the Inter-American Court in the case of the Tagaeri and Taromenane peoples vs.

Ecuador, which obliges the state to comply with the popular will within one year. The referendum halted the opening of the Ishpingo field, where eight new platforms would have been built, but existing wells in Tiputini and Tambococha continue operating: 247 in total. The government has declared only 10 closed and promises to reach 50 by the end of 2025.

On August 20, two years after the referendum, a "protest festival" was held: a celebration because citizens, through unprecedented initiatives, opened new paths to decide the future of threatened territories; and a protest because the state resists fully honoring the popular mandate. In the streets, people are beginning to read extractivism and colonialism as part of the same history of dispossession that must be interrupted.

Ecuador's decision to keep the oil of Block 43 underground was not only an ecological triumph or a gesture of national sovereignty: it was a civilizational statement in the face of the global crisis. However, the slow pace of closure in Yasuní and the opening of new oil frontiers in the southern Amazon and along the Ecuadorian coast contradict the spirit of that mandate.

In times of climate collapse and geopolitical violence, the "Yes to life" expressed in the Yasuní referendum opened the possibility of a "Yasunization of the world": a concrete strategy to leave fossil fuels underground as an act of resistance. The open question is whether Ecuadorian society—and the global community—will have the courage to defend that historic decision and turn it into a planetary example.

Interview

Nnimmo Bassey

Nigerian architect, poet, and environmental activist, internationally recognized for his tireless defense of human and environmental rights in Africa and around the world. His career has focused on denouncing the devastating impacts of oil and gas extraction in the Niger Delta, as well as promoting food sovereignty and climate justice. He began his activism in the 1980s, focusing on the defense of human rights as a member of the Board of Directors of the Nigerian Civil Liberties Organization. In 1993, she shifted her focus to environmental activism when she co-founded Environmental Rights Action (ERA), also known as Friends of the Earth Nigeria, where she led actions against the devastation caused by the oil industry. Under her leadership, ERA won a landmark ruling in 2005 that declared gas flaring in Nigeria unconstitutional. His books include We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood (2002), I Will Not Dance to Your Beat (2011), To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa (2012), and Oil Politics: Echoes of Ecological Wars (2016).
He has received numerous international awards, including: Environmental Hero by Time magazine (2009), the Right Livelihood Award (2010), the Rafto Prize for Human Rights (2012), the Wallenberg Medal (2024), and an honorary doctorate from the University of York, England (2019).

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Yasuní National Park is a place of extraordinary ecological and cultural importance. It is home to indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation and recent contact, and has become a global symbol of resistance, as it was the first place in the world where the initiative to keep oil underground as a way to combat the climate crisis was specifically proposed. Two years ago, in 2023, Ecuadorian society made a historic decision through a popular referendum. With a resounding 57% of the vote, the people expressed their democratic will to keep the oil unextracted in Block 43-ITT, located in the heart of Yasuní, and to initiate a comprehensive process of restoration for the area. From your perspective and global experience fighting oil extraction: **¿How can we link the ecological, cultural, and spiritual healing of these wounded territories with processes of decolonization and epistemic justice?**

I will say that the point is that extractivism itself is a very colonial model. When governments and corporations engage in extractive activities, extracting crude oil, gas, and minerals, they simply implement that model or take actions that can be characterized as completely colonial and anti-Mother Earth, anti-nature, anti-planet, and anti-people.

So, it doesn't surprise us at all that corporations and governments behave this way, thinking only of economic value. But the truth is that the damage done to our territories, whether in Ecuador or Nigeria, where I come from and live, is enormous.

Financial reparation is never enough, even though it is essential. It is never enough.

When people's environments are polluted due to extractive activities, not only is the environment polluted, but also their culture; people's spirituality is eroded, and their dignity is stripped away. It is a situation in which they are not respected.

And these extractive activities not only harm human beings, but also other beings with whom we share the planet. Therefore, some of us believe that what must be done is... what is it? As the people of Ecuador voted in the referendum: fossil fuels must remain underground; they must not be extracted.

But where they have already extracted and polluted the environment, as they have in Nigeria, in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Sucumbíos), and many other places, the first thing is to conduct an audit. An assessment must be made to determine the extent of the damage. Second, there must be a cleanup.

There must be decontamination, there must be remediation. A very thorough remediation. And then, the cleanup must be followed by restoration. The territory must be repaired, it must be restored, and then reparations must be paid. Payment or restitution is the end point. First, stop the contamination, which means stopping the extraction; second, cleanup and remediation; third, restoration. Finally, reparation, which goes beyond the monetary. It is necessary to recognize the multiple levels of damage caused to the environment, culture, and territories.

The extractivism taking place today, just as in the past, is only possible under the umbrella of colonialism. Thus, while colonialism as a historical-political phenomenon may have ended with independence in some regions, in terms of ecological actions and impacts, colonialism remains alive and well. Colonialism is fueled by governments and corporations for their own benefit, and we need to understand how colonialism operates.

Colonialism means taking resources by force. from territories, from people, from communities for the benefit of the power structure that is colonizing the territory In this sense, insisting on reparation is a very strong anti-colonial activity and goes beyond just

keeping the crude in the ground It goes to the very foundation of the coloniality of power and knowledge. It means overthrowing colonial power.

Rejecting colonial power also means overturning the thinking patterns and knowledge-generation systems that enable colonial structures to persist. Therefore, what this ultimately implies is that all of us must sit down and listen to the wisdom of our peoples.

This kind of knowledge is a clearly anti-colonial heritage because it arises from how people assume the power to define in their lives and territories what is acceptable to happen and what is not. In this sense, the idea of "Yasunizing" represents the pursuit of autonomy from colonial power—a crucial lesson we must learn from the communities living in and resisting oil extraction in Yasuní. This is why, regardless of geographical location, we in Nigeria are leading a campaign called "Yasunizing the Territory," which embodies this same spirit of autonomy and anti-colonial struggle.

Ogoni, Nigeria, we have been running a campaign for 30 years to stop oil extraction. The population has refused to destroy their territory since 1993 and has stood up against the government and corporations. These struggles are happening in many parts of the world, and they are growing. That is why the call to "Yasunize" or "Ogonize" must be understood as a global call.

We do not want the destruction of our territory. This is why our struggle is a deeply anti-colonial movement—one we must learn from, just as we learned from the people of Ecuador, who voted overwhelmingly to keep fossil fuels in the ground. It is a wake-up call against the war being waged on the Earth. Ultimately, it is about humility: we must humble ourselves and learn from Indigenous peoples And this is learned from the wisdom of elders and

their knowledge about the value of nature and our environment, which cannot be measured through money; it is not economic. The value of nature is holistic: it is about life itself, about living in harmony with it. Thus, this is the lesson from Yasuní that we must all promote.

- We know that the problem of climate change and the environmental crisis in general is not only an economic problem, but also a political and historical one. There is much talk about the need to differentiate between social actors, since, without a doubt, the so-called global North, with its commodification of nature and excessive exploitation, is largely responsible for the environmental crisis compared to the global South. However, little is said about the experience of the peoples of the global South as holders of alternatives to the massive destruction of industrial capitalism. **What is your opinion on whether the colonial experience of the peoples of the so-called global south can be a source of knowledge that provides concrete answers to the global problem of the environmental crisis?**

Absolutely, I believe it is impossible to envision any transformation without questioning the cultural roots of the problem. This is where the idea of Yasunization becomes relevant again—as an example not only of stopping exploitation but also of transitioning toward a different model of existence.

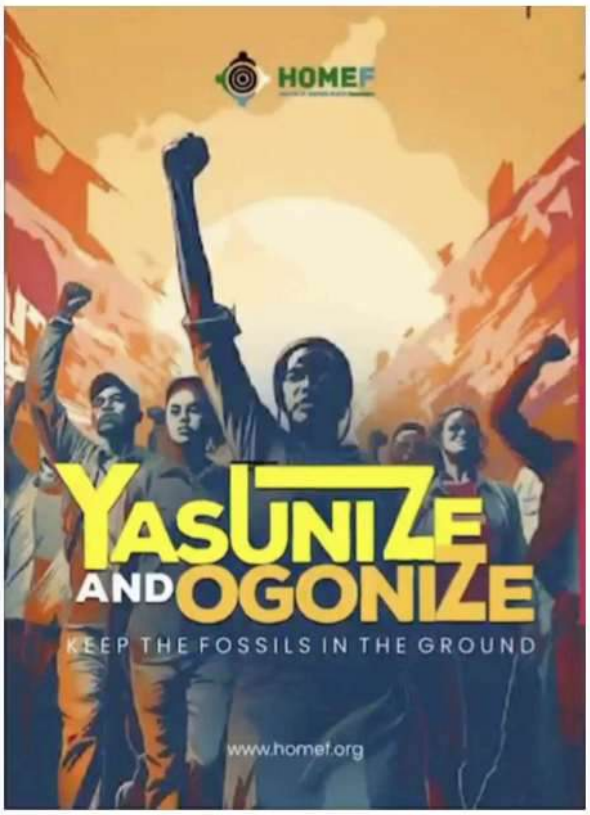
When we speak about energy transition, we must understand that it is not sufficient on its own: we must change our way of thinking, our modes of production and consumption, which are founded on accumulation, displacement, and the extermination

of people. The transition we need must be post-extractivist.

An extractivist model cannot be implemented and then later replaced by a transition. No true transition can cling to colonialism. Today we hear about "critical minerals" like lithium and cobalt, but they are extracted under the same paradigm as oil, gas, and coal: a paradigm of dispossession and violence. Millions of people are displaced because corporations demand to extract so-called "critical minerals." But when we call them "critical," we must ask: critical for whom? Is it critical for the people on whose territories extraction occurs—for those displaced or murdered? Or is it critical only for those who profit economically from these minerals?

This is where the lesson of keeping oil in the ground becomes vital. It is a broad concept that extends to all forms of extractivism—a wisdom born from the concrete experiences of peoples who have suffered its violence.

As long as we lack a truly grassroots democracy, where communities themselves decide what happens on their land, nothing will change. Colonialism does not consult; it imposes. Colonialism is about power—the power to invade, to steal, to destroy the very basis of life. It forces dependency and subordination. That is why resistance to it is a profound anticolonial struggle. When we cut the vampires of extractivism from our necks, we are taking back our blood, our land, and our future



↑ Nnimmo Bassey holding the "Yasunize and Ogonize the World" poster during his speech for Earth Day 2025, calling to keep fossil fuels underground following the example of the Ogoni communities of Nigeria and Yasuní of Ecuador.

← "Yasunize and Ogonize the World" poster. Health of Mother Earth Foundation.

● Let's talk a bit about the global scenario at the moment and the importance of oil. Currently, there are many ongoing wars. We know that oil was the cause of many wars in history, but today, **do you think that oil—its exploitation, trade, and use—is related to current wars?**

Absolutely. There is a direct connection between oil and current conflicts. Today, it is evident that multiple powers—often heirs to colonial logics—are waging wars that destroy territories and communities, with the clear objective of controlling strategic resources. It is, in essence, a global struggle for control over oil and gas.

The war in Europe, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, starkly demonstrated this dynamic. When Russia cut off gas supplies, it triggered an energy crisis that accelerated a frantic search for alternatives: new oil and gas pipelines, massive imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG), and a surge of extractive projects in Africa, Latin America, and other regions. The war not only exposed our dependence on fossil fuels but also revealed the geopolitical will to control their access.

Today, we are witnessing a fierce struggle over nearly every delta and sedimentary basin in Africa: in Mozambique, Senegal, Namibia, Congo, Nigeria, and Egypt, to name a few. Where there is oil or gas, there is conflict. The obsession with hoarding these resources through violent extractivism is generating violence, displacement, and what many now call "environmental genocide."

Even in peace negotiations—those so-called "peace deals in quotes"—the shadow of resources looms large. It's not just about silencing guns; it's about securing access to critical minerals, gas, or oil. It's brazen: unscrupulous politicians negotiate

territories and rights in exchange for extraction contracts, in a deeply colonial and imperial logic.

In response, resistance is growing. Global society is organizing. Take the case of Ecuador and the struggle for Yasuní: it is a powerful example of how the voice of the people can prevail over the interests of corporations and governments. It is a struggle for sovereignty, for the moral right to stop the destruction of nature and guarantee the right to life.

Yet, changing this reality is difficult. Change clashes against two powerful forces: greed and comfort. The greedy always want more; the comfortable would rather not disrupt their lifestyles. To transform this, we need more than protests: we need to reinvent our imaginaries.

We need new words, new narratives, new poems and songs. We need dances and laughter in the revolution, because there can be no change without joy. We want to live well, in harmony with nature, as children of Mother Earth. We cannot allow predators to continue destroying with impunity.

It will take time, but it will happen. Transformation is underway.

- In your opinion, or in your own words, **how do you consider the spoken word—the language we use—to be relevant for imagining and building another possible world?**

The arts and cultural tools are crucial in this struggle, because people must first believe that something is possible before they can make it a reality. We need to dream of a different future and then wake up and work

to build it. Dreaming isn't about staying asleep; it's about waking up with determination.

When you have a powerful dream, you get up and act to make it happen. That's why we must unleash our imagination—our collective imaginaries—to dream together as a society. This isn't about individual dreams, but about weaving networks of solidarity: connecting Asia, America, Europe, and Africa. We need the conscious children of Mother Earth to dream together, sing new songs, and see what is still invisible to many.

I am convinced that we will succeed. It all begins in the mind: we must have the courage to ask ourselves uncomfortable questions and challenge the status quo. As one of my heroes, Che Guevara, said: "Be realistic: demand the impossible." We must not limit ourselves. We live in a world turned upside down—as Eduardo Galeano would say—and we must use our imagination to turn it right again.

We can only achieve this through creativity. The campaign "Keep the oil in the ground," which began in the nineties, is an example. At first, it sounded crazy; today, it's a global slogan. Even if many still don't act, territories like Yasuní show that it is possible. They will keep the oil in the ground.

More and more people are waking up. We must continue telling stories, singing, writing poems, and celebrating every step that brings us closer to that other possible world.

- Finally, **what do you think are currently the key references or models for driving social transformation from Indigenous peoples and social movements? Where does the collective knowledge reside that seeks alternatives to the multisystemic crisis we are experiencing today?**

Yes, it is a very interesting question and problem. Sometimes people look for solutions in the wrong places. But I believe there must be a confluence. Different types of knowledge are coming together.

And that is how we must do it: we must draw knowledge from different places and center our search for solutions on indigenous knowledge, because for centuries, thousands, millions of years, they have lived in harmony with nature without destroying it, knowing that we are all a part of it.

So the history already exists. A laboratory exists. A library of knowledge exists in the communities of the Territories. So we just need a little humility; humility to be silent for a while and listen to the knowledge. The knowledge holders listen to the music and the stories told by the butterflies, the parrots, the trees, the birds.

It requires a lot of silence. We humans are making too much noise in the world. Too much discussion in the world. We need to listen and ask ourselves: Who are we, really? How are we different from the lion, the elephant? How are we different from the trees, the fish? What can we learn from them?

Human beings are the only ones who pollute the world. How is it that we are the only animals that pollute the world? and just extract, and destroy?

Money is an imaginary thing that gives value to something you write on your computer. And then someone says, "I have a million dollars," and you never see the money. So we need to change our perspective on the world.

And we need to learn from the people. We have some programs that we implement in Nigeria called "learning from the sages." And the sages are not necessarily elderly people. They can be young. It could be a university professor. It could be a person in the

village, in the community, in the Territories.

But when you recognize those knowledge holders, you sit down and remain silent. You forget what you knew before, because there is a new pattern of knowing and obeying, of listening from silence and observing, observing the faces, not just hearing.

Using all the senses, understanding the forces that work to protect Mother Earth and to show us how to be good children. And that is why we need that kind of knowledge. And we need activist teachers. We need everyone who recognizes that we are part of nature and are no different from anything else we coexist with.

Some people believe they can destroy the planet and go to outer space, build a colony on Mars or the Moon, or do space tourism and forget where the planet is headed. There are people like that, but they are not the people of the future. They pretend to work for the future, but the future lies in harmony with Mother Earth. The future is post-extractivist.

And that is why we are building that future together, for example, by implementing the decision of the Ecuadorian people, who voted to leave fossil fuels in the ground. We must stand in solidarity with the people of Ogoni, in Nigeria, who for 32 years have declared that extraction is not allowed in our territory.

We must support the people of Uganda, who have said: 'We do not want a pipeline that will destroy our environment, displace our people, and destroy everything for the benefit of exploiters and corporations.

It is a big dream, but it is a simple thing. We are part of nature. Let's keep fossil fuels in the ground, where they belong, and build a life in harmony with each other and with everything around us.

Serious allegations of military repression against the Waorani community in Yasuní

On September 20, amid a national indigenous mobilization, acts of violence were reported in Block 31 of the Yasuní region, raising concerns about possible violations of the human and collective rights of Indigenous peoples. Women, youth, and children from the Waorani community of Mintaro were repressed by members of the Ecuadorian Army during a community action protesting PetroEcuador's failure to fulfill its social commitments.

According to local organizations, the military intervention was unrelated to the national strike called by the Indigenous movement and resulted in the arbitrary detention of two community members, one of whom was a minor, who was later released after seeking precautionary measures. The second community member remains detained, and the community is demanding his release.

The Ecuadorian Army issued a statement accusing the community of having attacked soldiers with firearms during the events. However, the Waorani Nationality of Ecuador (NAWE) categorically rejected these accusations, stating that the Waorani people do not carry firearms and that the only armed presence in the territory is the police force.

The organization denounced that such official statements seek to criminalize the legitimate resistance of Indigenous communities and protect oil interests in the region, at the expense of the lives, integrity, and rights of Indigenous peoples and the Amazonian ecosystem.

For Yasuní defenders, these incidents are not isolated, but rather reflect a state policy that, far from

↑ NAWE warns of repression and arrests in Mintaro during protests against PetroEcuador in Yasuní National Park. Source: Instagram NAWE

Puyo, 21 de septiembre de 2025

COMUNICADO OFICIAL

La NAWE alerta sobre represión y detenciones en Mintaro

La Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador (NAWE) comunica a la opinión pública y a nuestras comunidades que, en la comunidad de Mintaro, ubicada en la provincia de Orellana, nuestros compañeros y compañeras se han levantado en una **acción comunitaria frente al incumplimiento de los compromisos de reparación social y ambiental por parte de PetroEcuador en los bloques 31 y 43 ubicados dentro del Parque Nacional Yasuní**, empresa que opera en este territorio desde hace más de diez años.

Ante el abandono del Estado y la falta de respuesta de esta empresa petrolera estatal, la comunidad se ha visto obligada a emprender esta acción de hecho.

En este marco, el día de ayer, 20 de septiembre de 2025, **líderes y lideresas, jóvenes, mujeres y niños de Mintaro fueron reprimidos por las fuerzas públicas**. Durante la represión fueron detenidos dos compañeros indígenas de la comunidad. Hasta el momento, las autoridades no han informado sobre el proceso legal ni sobre el estado de salud de nuestros hermanos.

La NAWE hace un llamado a la opinión pública nacional, a las organizaciones de derechos humanos y a la comunidad internacional a mantenerse vigilantes frente a esta grave violación de derechos colectivos e individuales.

Consejo de Gobierno
Nacionalidad Waorani del Ecuador - NAWE

↑ Official statement from NAWE on the events of September 20: police repression and arbitrary arrests against the Waorani community. Source: NAWE Instagram

Noticias

↑ Organizations denounce the criminalization of Waorani resistance to oil operations in Yasuní. Source: Instagram Latin American Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

↑ NAWE and Stand.earth demand that the Ecuadorian government release detainees, respect collective rights, and end repression in Waorani territories. Source: Instagram Stand.earth

advancing a post-oil transition—as citizens elected at the polls—continues to support oil extraction in ancestral territories. Oil extraction perpetuates corruption, racism, and disregard for collective rights, the self-determination of peoples, and the protection of nature.

The Amazon is not a sacrifice zone. Yasuní is a territory of life, memory, and future. We call on the Ecuadorian state to respect the lives of indigenous peoples in the Yasuní and also the country's popular decision to transition towards post-extractivism, as expressed in the 2023 popular referendum.

• *Por la vida, la restauración y la justicia* •