

PRESS RELEASE

International coalition for the protection of the natural resources of Western Sahara

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INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN UNLEASHED

AGAINST PLUNDERING OF HYDROCARBONS IN WESTERN SAHARA

Shareholders of companies involved advised to divest

Dutch and British companies involved in the geological exploration of the seabed of Western Sahara have become the target of an international campaign led by the Norwegian, Dutch and UK branches of an international coalition for the protection of the natural resources of Western Sahara. They are accused by campaigners of being complicit to the illegal occupation of Western Sahara by Morocco, they are requested to hand over collected data to the Polisario Front, and the shareholders of the companies are being urged to divest. Amongst the bigger shareholders is the ING Group.

In spite of the special status of Western Sahara - a non-self governing territory still to be decolonized and occupied by Morocco since 1975 - the Dutch company FUGRO NV agreed to carry out seismic surveys on behalf of the Oklahoma based company Kerr-McGee, which won a license from Morocco in 2001. A British subsidiary of Fugro, Svitzer, has been carrying out the survey.

The international coalition for the protection of natural resources of Western Sahara has today sent letters to the president and CEO of Fugro, Mr G-J. Kramer, and to its subsidiaries involved in the actual survey work, condemning their activity in the occupied territory.

- The companies have been advised that any current and future involvement in the exploration of hydrocarbons in Western Sahara is illegitimate, politically improper and ethically irresponsible, says Liesbeth den Haan from the Netherlands Foundation for the right to Self-Determination for the Saharawi people. The Dutch organization is one of over 20 organizations currently participating in the international coalition.

- We are disillusioned with the lack of transparency in the operations of these companies, and their unwillingness to disclose any specific information about their activities. We interpret their silence as a deliberate strategy to try and stall for time until their illegal activities have been completed, she continues.

The Advisory Boards of the above mentioned companies received a copy of the letter sent to the President of Fugro, and were informed that the companies are seen as being complicit in the illegal occupation of Western Sahara. Shareholders have been advised to take immediate action on these unethical activities, either through divestment or dialogue. In the letter sent to the

largest shareholders of Fugro N.V, the campaign group states:

"Last year, a Norwegian seismic survey company, TGS-Nopec, carried out precisely the same kind of activities in the very same area. 25 of their shareholders sold their shares as a consequence, among them the ethical fund administrator Banco, an investor in the ABN-AMRO group. The company's two biggest shareholders, The Storebrand Group and The Norwegian government, put pressure on TGS-Nopec to change its policy. The two investors had a total stock value of approximately 20 million euros. It was a result of the investors' involvement or divestment, that TGS-Nopec finally regretted their contract, and publicly renounced any more activities in the occupied territory. Today, TGS-Nopec has established a Code of Conduct to ensure that they do not make the same mistake again."

The only response that the campaign group has received from Fugro so far (apart from an announcement that the survey from one of its subsidiaries is recently completed) is the assertion that no UN embargo is in place in Western Sahara.

- 'This is completely irrelevant', states Den Haan. - 'We demand a guarantee from Fugro NV that no future exploration activities will be carried out in Western Sahara without the consent of the Saharawi people, and that the data collected will be handed over to their representatives - the Polisario Front and not be sold or given to companies that aim at extraction of oil in Western Sahara on basis of a contract with Moroccan entities. The Dutch group (Stichting Zelfbeschikking West-Sahara) has requested an urgent meeting with the mother company Fugro NV based in Leidschendam.

Earlier this month, the foreign minister of the Sahrawi government in exile protested strongly at Fugro, stating:

"It is disingenuous for Fugro NV to attempt to hide this decision behind a commercial tendering process. You will be well aware that other seismic companies have withdrawn bids for this work once the gravity of the political situation became apparent. Western Sahara is clearly a country in conflict, in which Fugro N.V. is now involved without authorisation from the legitimate administration.

The Government of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, which is a full-fledged member of the African Union and recognised by over 70 countries worldwide, considers the activities of Fugro N.V. to be unauthorised, illegal and an insult to the Saharawi people. On this basis, we call for Fugro to either act in a responsible manner and cease its activities immediately or accept the full consequences for these actions."

For more information:

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