The Paris Agreement Undermines the Global Campaign to Leave Oil in the Soil

Almost 20 years ago, in the Japanese city of Kyoto, the Oilwatch network along with over 200 other organizations launched the pioneering proposal of the oil moratorium, in order to put an end to the problems that occur where fossil fuels are extracted, and also as the most effective way to combat climate change. Since then the campaign to leave hydrocarbons underground has spread all over the world. Oilwatch's arguments have finally been heard and embraced by many people.

However, this large group does not include governments or those who spearheaded the Conferences of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In fact, the negotiations have been a total fraud, mainly since the Kyoto Protocol of 1997. The Kyoto Protocol is an international, legally-binding instrument that contains industrialized countries' commitments to reduce their emissions. These negotiations have ended up being mere business meetings, and totally illegitimate from a democratic standpoint. The 21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) in Paris, France was no different, nor was the recent meeting in the Moroccan city of Marrakech.

Since 1995, there have now been 22 Conferences of the Parties to the Convention on Climate Change. In these meetings, the Parties have issued at least 400 decisions and 20 resolutions; they have drawn up a Call, a Mandate, a Guide, an Action Framework, a Roadmap and a Protocol; they have agreed to two Action Plans, two Declarations and two Work Plans; they adopted an Accord and have signed four Agreements, including the Paris Agreement.

Meanwhile, greenhouse gas emissions and their consequences on the climate have continued to increase and worsen. Anyone with common sense would wonder why the problem persists, after so much time, expenditure of resources and bulky paraphernalia? The answer is obvious: none of the international climate negotiations has addressed the main cause of climate change: the extraction and burning of fossil fuels.

Reading the Paris Agreement carefully — and with our suspicion meter on — we see that the situation will get worse. According to those who promote the campaign to leave fossil fuels in the ground, this new Agreement denies the possibility of moving toward a post-oil civilization.

At a certain moment in the implementation of the Convention on Climate Change, what should have been counted — barrels of oil, cubic meters of gas and tons of carbon that should remain underground — transformed into the amount of carbon present in the atmosphere and reduction of CO2 emissions. The purpose was simple: avoid a radical shift in the means of production and consumption while enabling the private sector to turn the climate crisis into a business opportunity.

The Paris Agreement now sets goals like "keeping the temperature rise below 2°C..." which makes it even more ambiguous and dangerous. This is in part because the average global temperature has already risen almost one degree since the beginning of the industrial revolution in 1850, and because the temperature is not the same everywhere on the planet. For example, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Africa is probably the most warming continent and yet

the continent which emits the least amount of carbon. These apparent twists of language—from climate change to mitigation and emissions reduction, from the fight against global warming to low-carbon economies, from "common but differentiated responsibilities" to "global balance," and from crisis of civilization to temperature degrees—are not accidental; they are made to confuse and evade the real problem, so that impunity reigns and true solutions are sidelined.

The Paris Agreement states that to prevent a temperature rise of more than 2ºC, the so-called INDC (National Accounts Determined Contributions) will be taken into account. Almost every country has made its pledges before the United Nations, but there is no mechanism to enforce them. In many cases, such as in Ecuador, they are consultations without any societal participation and offers thrown about without any basis in reality. Simply reading some of the INDC documents is enough to realize this.

Bolivia, for example, includes the delirious "indicator of percentage distribution of the carbon budget" or “Climate Justice Index,” proposing the formula =?exp(?1?2?3?4+5)? (!) to calculate the index (1) or the Sustainable Life of Forest Index, using the formula j= ? ? ? + ? + ? +, to represent the life and rights of people living in the forest.

Ecuador includes the massive distribution of 1,500,000 electric induction cookers — which by the way few people buy — 1,300,000 hectares of monoculture tree plantations by 2025, expansion of the Socio Bosque Program (2) with incentives of two million additional hectares by 2017, and other promises. Socio Bosque, the Ministry of the Environment's program considered in REDD+ plans in Ecuador, is currently paralyzed due to the economic crisis in the country. There are hopes to implement the mechanisms included in the Paris Agreement at an institutional level, and for private company to invest more in order to obtain carbon offset certificates. In order for Socio Bosque plans to fit into REDD, the areas included in the program must be threatened by deforestation. This is because REDD areas must comply with the principle of additionality—demonstrating that the emissions saved would not have occurred without the Socio Bosque program. Indeed they are threatened, since there is a clear imposition of oil and mining interests in areas under the Socio Bosque program.

The INDCs—the action plans each country presented to the UNFCCC—are only initial exercises to create a baseline of national emissions. Such baselines are necessary for a kind of global carbon market to work, which the Paris Agreement would be creating. They are also necessary to generate goals for 2025. Of course nobody can know this, but that does not matter. The more you play with the numbers, up or down, the more business deals are on the table. It is striking that the sum of emissions reductions promised in the INDCs would lead to a temperature rise of up to 3.7°C (the Paris Agreement says it wants to reach 2°C, and in a best-case scenario 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels). The Paris Agreement invites the whole world to cheat, turning addressing the climate problem into a global casino.

And as we say in Latin America, "once the law has been made, so has the trap." The largest trap lies in the Paris Agreement, which creates a new market mechanism "to contribute to the mitigation of greenhouse gases and support sustainable development," involving transactions of "internationally transferred mitigation outcomes" (ITMOs). In other words, the carbon market that already exists—through the nefarious Clean Development Mechanism, European Union Emissions Trading Scheme, or the voluntary carbon offsets market, among others—can now exist between countries or regions. That is, if a country claims to have done a good job in reducing its emissions vis-a-vis promises in its INDCs, this favorable difference could be sold to another country that has polluted more.

This obviously repeats history: it does not reduce global emissions. On the contrary, it allows the mining and oil frontier to expand, agribusiness to grow, loss of forest cover to continue, and the aviation industry to grow. The aviation industry plans to increase its emissions by 700% and steadily increase the global transport of goods—problems directly responsible for global warming. (3)

With the Paris Agreement, the progress of the international Leave the Oil Underground campaign could be undermined, as many organizations unfortunately believe the Paris Agreement represents a paradigm shift; going as far as to say that it marks “the end of the era of fossil fuels” (350.org, US-based organization that works on the issue of climate change) or that the Paris Agreement “will drive the global energy revolution” (the NGO Greenpeace). It will not do any of this.

For the Ecuadorian government, the Paris Agreement "represents the starting point of a world with clean energy, through effective implementation of firm strategies to reduce global emissions of greenhouse gases." These words mean nothing coming from the mouths of those who have begun oil exploitation in the internationally renowned Yasuní National Park, in block 43-ITT (see the article Women and oil: The struggle for Sumak Kawsay in WRM Newsletter No. 200). This is further evidence of the government's resignation not to be a leader on climate, disappointing Ecuadorians and the world—since the Yasuní-ITT Initiative (4) was going to leave 850 million barrels of oil in the ground.

Ivonne Yanez, (ivonney@accionecologica.org)
Acción Ecológica
Member of the WRM Advisory Committee

(1) Details of the formula are explained on page 12 of the document "Intended Nationally Determined Contribution from the Plurinational State of Bolivia,"
http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/
Bolivia/1/INDC-Bolivia-english.pdf
(2) The publication “REDD: A Collection of Conflicts, Contradictions and Lies” includes a chapter on the Socio Bosquhttp://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/Bolivia/
1/INDC-Bolivia-english.pdfe Program, http://wrm.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/REDD-A-Collection-of-Conflict_Contradictions_Lies_expanded.pdf
(3) For more information on the protests against the aviation industry's plans to continue growing and to "green" this growth see: http://systemchange-not-climatechange.at/aviation-campaign/
(4) For more information on the Yasuní-ITT Initiative, see Acción Ecológica's webpage:
http://www.accionecologica.org/petroleo/yasuni
In English: Towards a Post-Oil Civilization. Yasunization and other initiatives to leave fossil fuels in the soil. http://www.ejolt.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/05
/130520_EJOLT6_High2.pdf