

The U'wa Tribe's Struggle for Environmental Justice

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Research Question

What are the cultural, environmental and political affects of mineral exploration and extraction in and around the U'wa territory and traditional land in regard to indigenous rights and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation?

The Uwa Tribe

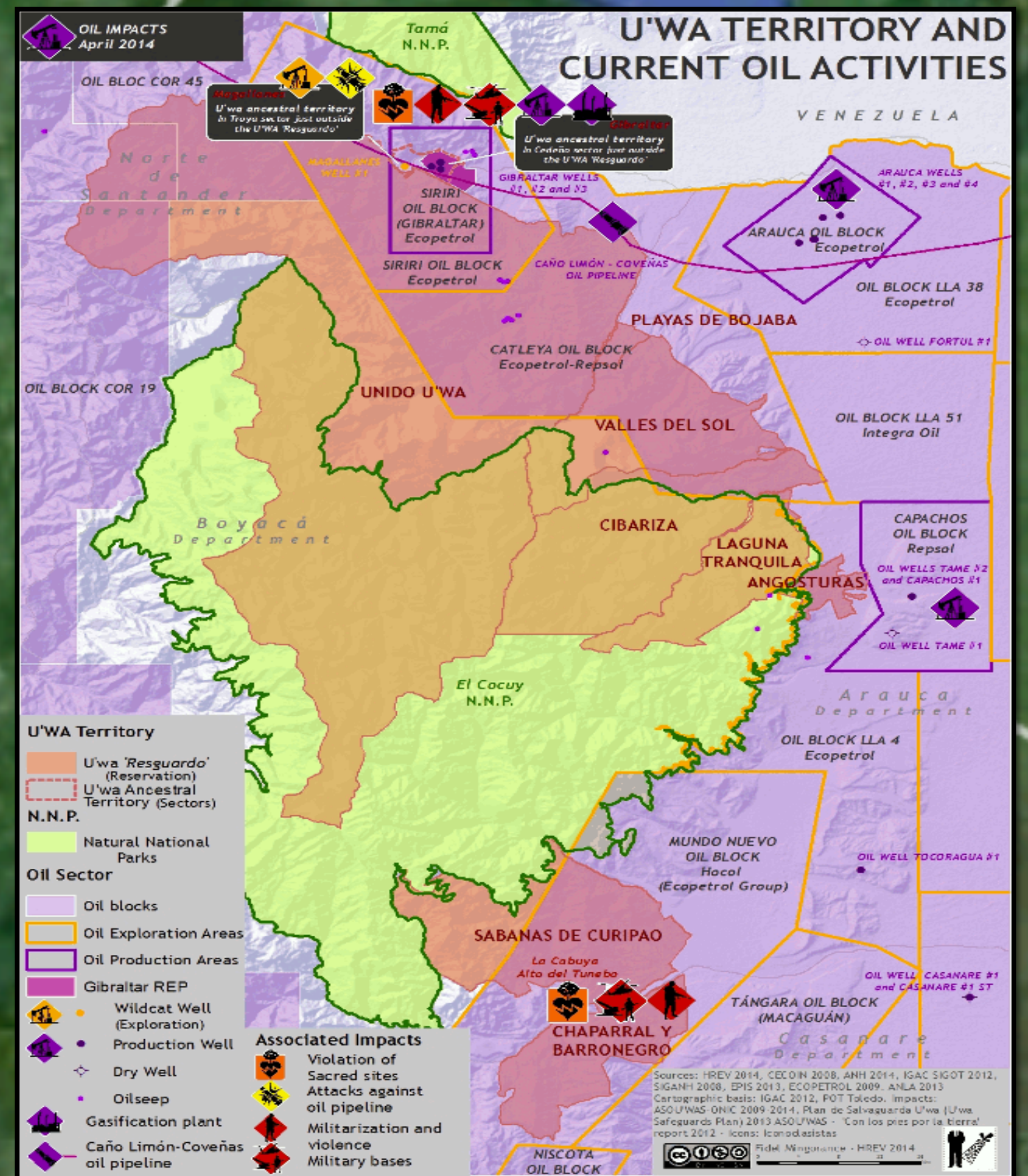
- The Uwa Peoples inhabit the Samoré region in northeastern Colombia.
- U,wa territory consists of close to 200,000 hectares, not including ancestral territory, and is home to an estimated 6,000 indigenous peoples (Minority Rights Group International).
- The U'wa peoples have lived with an interconnected relationship with the land for hundreds of years.
- The U'wa are a federally recognized tribe who own the rights to the land according to Colombia's 1991 constitutional amendments that grants protection and land recognition to 89 of the countries indigenous tribes.
- The U'wa territory is federally protected; however, the Colombian government states that the U'wa do not hold the mineral rights to the land.

Environmental Justice

- The Colombian government, along with extractive industries, has marginalized the U'wa people for purposes of economic development disregarding their indigenous rights.
- The U'wa people are far more impacted by the affects of climate change and environmental degradation do to their strong dependence of the land both for the preservation of their culture and physical wellbeing.
- The U'wa peoples are more affected due to their lack of decision-making power when it comes to issue that impact their way of life.



Photo of U'wa spokesmen Berito Kuwaru'wa, by Goldman Staff



Map of oil exploration in the U'wa territory by Amazon Watch

Environmental Impact

- The U'wa peoples are greatly experiencing the affect of climate change and environmental degradation, and this is impacting their way of life and ability to live off the land.
- Impacts of resource extraction in the region include water and soil contamination, air pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change.
- The impacts of oil drilling in the region include deforestation, oil spills, and ecosystem degradation (Cohan 140).
- An increase in political violence against the government and extractive industries, such as bombing of pipelines, can impact the territory.

Future Action

- The U'wa believe that any form of oil development in the region will greatly disrupt their way of life; therefore, they are apposed to oil exploration in or around their territory.
- Not until the Colombian government upholds the rights of its indigenous communities and begins to respect their connection to the land will the U'wa people find justice (Miller).
- The U'wa people must be able to take part in the decision making process regarding issues that effect their wellbeing and way of life.



Photo of Cano Limon pipeline explosion by Goldman Staff

References and Acknowledgments

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