

Article: **Congo Brazzaville: oil and gas flarings pollute the coasts**

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Nationality: Congolese

Publication: Press Agency Syfia International

Type of Media: Internet Publication (www.syfia.info)

Date: 2 September 2003

Congo Brazzaville: oil and gas flarings pollute the coasts

by **Esther Pabou Mbaki, Jean Valère Ngoubangoyi**

(Syfia Congo) Tar on the beaches, fish with the hydrocarbon taste, desiccated plants, populations suffering from respiratory diseases... In Congo Brazzaville, the intensive exploitation of oil at sea pollutes the coasts seriously. That about which seem little to worry the all-powerful oil companies and hardly more the government.

"Certain days water becomes very dirty, and the fishermen do not go at sea. Oil pollution prevents us from concluding our activities. We are obliged to go further to hope to return with a quantity of fish ", notes Habram Mossassi, fisherman to 30 km of Pointe-Noire, capital economic of Congo, on the Atlantic Coast. Along this coast more than 120 wells of oil working are indeed in activity and a score of flares burns day and night there. All the large oil companies are present in water congolaises to start with TotalFinaElf, the largest operator, but also Agip, Shell, Chevron... Congo Brazzaville is the third oil producer in Africa behind Nigeria and Angola. An intensive exploitation whose the environment feels. These last years, the sea waters and the atmosphere are constantly polluted by "the oils poured in the sea and the pollutant tons of gases released in the air coming from the sites where proceeds the offshore oil rig oil exploitation", specifies Martial Makondi, tallies with the anti-pollution cell, of the ministry for Hydrocarbons "In the town of Point-Black, one noted that there is often tar on the beach", adds it without however giving figures, for lack of reliable studies on the extent of the pollution of the coasts congolaises by hydrocarbons. Many Pontenegrins which liked to go on the wild Coast deserted the places. As Jocelyne Mambou which regrets it, the glance fixed on the smoke which leaves the offshore oil rigs: "Since the tankers discharge their oils with broad, my friends and me ceased bathing us". Since the Nineties, oil discharges are daily "the tar, of dirty oil... even go up very high in the lagoon of Conkouati which constitutes one of the surfaces protected from the country", testifies Marcel Tati, chief of the projects of the nature conservation in Conkouati, to 160 km of Pointe-Noire.

The heat of the flares desiccates the plants

In certain villages located close of the sites of exploitation like that of Djeno or Loango, to 20 km of the city, the hot air of the flares which burn natural gas desiccates the seedlings and the cultures: palm trees, sheets of manioc, and other vegetables... The impotent populations badly support the strong odors released by these gases "Several times, I spoke with the authorities about the area about Kouilou, but they do not react", is indignant Jean Jacques Goma Makaya, chief of the village of Laongo where it even became difficult to find fruit trees. Pontenegrins which prefers to buy their fish directly in the villages of fishermen note that they have a hydrocarbon after-taste. They show rare Ong which are occupied of environment not to denounce with enough strength these problems "We have very limited means. This is why our claims do not bear fruits. Especially that we are not decision makers ", explains Yves Mbama, one of the persons in charge for association the humane Cause. Difficult, indeed, to be made hear all-powerful oil companies. In July 2002, the bishops of central Africa rose against the degradation of the living conditions of the populations and invited the oil companies "to offer compensations to the touched populations". In Kouilou, these compensations result in the construction of roads, schools, dispensaries... and especially the distribution of bribes to the authorities of the area, comments on one living of Pointe-Noire. Unfortunately, regrets Calvin Ampieh, administrator of the Observatory congolais of the biodiversity and of the environment, "the principle of the pollutant-payer is a thing which does not apply as it is necessary on our premises. Impossible thus to impose a tax of pollution waters of sea and atmosphere against these companies ".

Raise respiratory affections

For the oil companies, the expansion of the activity does not harm the ecosystems. In a leaflet on Kitina, one of the new oil fields recently put in exploitation, Agip Congo Research, affirms that the exploitation "is entirely conceived in coherence with the criteria of environmental protection produced by Agip Recherches for the Republic of Congo and its coastal zone". As for the person in charge for the accountancy of TotalfinaElf, which speaks under anonymity, it estimates that "the populations are wrong to think that we have contempt for their health. Each year our company spends important money sums for health". However, tuberculosis and other respiratory affections are in full increase and constitute the principal reasons for consultation in the hospitals of the city. Nearly 300 million tons of natural gas would be flarings each year in the flares, which is interdict in the Western countries where this source of energy is recovered. In Congo, it is only in December 2002 that a first power station with gas was inaugurated to make up the energy deficit of Pointe-Noire. In July 2003, the Council of Ministers finally decided that Congo was to ratify the International Convention on the civil liability for the damage due to pollution by hydrocarbons. It is a first step...