

Support countries to leave hydrocarbons in the ground



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● We must not accept the prospect of a catastrophic future as our inescapable destiny. Instead, we must make profound changes to our way of life. Most of all we must change our relationship with nature, which so often we feel we own, rather than being a part of it.

According to the journal *Nature*, if we want to move away from the point of no return and heighten our chances of staying within a 1.5°C global temperature increase, we must leave 90% of the coal, 58% of the oil, and 59% of the gas in the world unextracted (proven reserves as of 2018).

But how can that scientific reality be made a political possibility?

It is encouraging that Colombia's government has made the search for a just energy transition one of its main priorities. This includes bold policies such as curbing the search and extraction of fossil fuels, diversifying the sources of energy generation, expanding the national productive sector to reduce fiscal dependence on extractive activities, and broadening the spectrum of participation and guarantee of rights, including the right to energy.

But such a comprehensive position faces challenges, even from within the government. The principles set out in its Just Energy Transition Roadmap are at odds with other official sources in which timidity continues to prevail.

We must not ignore the difficulties facing countries that set out to achieve the bold change that science demands. For a complex country like Colombia to marshal all its political and economic forces behind a just energy transition needs more than leadership from within. It also requires international cooperation.

The news that the Ecuadorian people have voted to keep the oil in the Yasuní reserve in

the ground is inspiring, but we must remember that attempts have been made to do this in the past. Bold initiatives like this, which benefit the planet but can harm the short-term economic prospects of particular countries, require deep macroeconomic changes and need to be financially supported by the international community via renegotiations of foreign debt, special environmental funds, and other innovative solutions.

Indeed, supporting countries to make a just energy transition must go beyond compensation-based models which risk commodifying nature, masking the real problems or undermining the demands for justice behind the notion of an energy transition of and for the people. On the contrary, energy must be understood as a common good whose extraction and use has occurred unequally and unfairly in historical, geographical, and class terms, with consequences for both human beings and non-human nature.

Climate crisis and environmental protection are inherently linked. A just energy transition can only take place if, as a *sine qua non* condition, there is a commitment to leave hydrocarbons in the ground (all of them, not only those in the Amazon), and if community forms of land, water and energy management are respected and strengthened, in order to step off the path to destruction.■