

June 4, 2024

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

We are writing to you with a renewed sense of urgency regarding the situation of Steven Donziger, a U.S. human rights lawyer whose case has garnered international attention and outrage. Mr. Donziger helped Amazon Indigenous and farmer communities in Ecuador win a landmark pollution judgment against Chevron for having [deliberately discharged billions of gallons of oil waste](#) over a period of decades onto Indigenous ancestral lands as a cost-saving measure.

Mr. Donziger recently was subject to arbitrary detention in New York for 993 days on a Class B misdemeanor contempt charge prosecuted by a private law firm after the Department of Justice declined to pursue the case. As a result of the private prosecution, Mr. Donziger, spent [close to three years in detention at home and in prison](#) even though the maximum sentence under the law for his misdemeanor offense level was six months. The judicial process that led to Mr. Donziger's detention has been condemned by highly respected jurists in the United States and around the world, including the [United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#) (WGAD), whose five members were appalled by the bias in the judicial process against Mr. Donziger and found his detention to be [illegal and "arbitrary" under international law](#).

Despite previous appeals and significant concern expressed by the WGAD over two years ago, there has been no response from the U.S. government. Furthermore, the situation for Mr. Donziger has only worsened. Chevron continues to escalate legal and public relations attacks against its opponents, exacerbating the pressing need for action. Chevron's ongoing efforts to avoid accountability for egregious environmental damage it has caused in Ecuador and elsewhere also highlight the [urgent need for intervention to correct this injustice](#). In addition, the [growing corporate attacks on free speech](#) and the [targeting of environmental and social justice activists](#) who successfully challenge corporate power threatens the rights of more Americans daily.

Our renewed calls for a pardon for Mr. Donziger and compliance with the WGAD in Mr. Donziger's case includes a request that your administration launch a comprehensive investigation

into Chevron's illegal and abusive retaliation campaign to evade compensating the people it harmed. As a result of Chevron's abysmal failure to clean up its pollution, Amazon Indigenous and farmer communities continue to face imminent risk of death and the decimation of their unique cultures. As [U.S. Representative Jim McGovern](#) stated, "This is about more than a court case—it's about sending a message that corporate polluters need to be held accountable for breaking the law, and that they shouldn't be allowed to harass and intimidate those who seek justice. The truth is that it's the executives at Chevron, not Steve Donziger, who should have been put on trial for what they did."

We urge you to immediately pardon Mr. Donziger's 2022 Class B federal misdemeanor conviction issued after a non-jury trial for contempt of court. Granting a pardon to Mr. Donziger would achieve three key government objectives: it would assert the executive branch's intolerance for judicial overreach in prosecutorial discretion, especially in cases influenced by corporate interests against human rights defenders. It would reinforce the U.S. commitment to international human rights standards and signal support to environmental and human rights advocates by rejecting the precedent of private corporate prosecutions. This action would also uphold justice by rectifying the arbitrary mistreatment of Mr. Donziger, demonstrating that corporations cannot misuse the judicial system to criminalize legitimate human rights activism, particularly amid the global climate crisis.

The misdemeanor conviction of a well-known U.S. human rights lawyer after a clearly unfair trial prosecuted by a corporate law firm is not only counter to international human rights law, it also sets a [dangerous legal precedent for human rights defenders and attorneys](#) nationwide. A pardon for Mr. Donziger will send a clear message that corporations in the U.S. cannot abuse and manipulate the legal system to 'criminalize' human rights defenders and environmental advocates who hold them accountable. The Biden administration must comply with the WGAD decision and its own human rights commitments by assiduously protecting the rights of human rights defenders like Mr. Donziger. Furthermore, the President should advance accountability by adhering to the recommendation by the WGAD to launch an investigation into the reasons that triggered Mr. Donziger's arbitrary detention. Ultimately, it is critical that Chevron remediate the massive toxic contamination it has admitted to discharging into Ecuador's Amazon over a period of decades.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your prompt action to address this injustice.

Sincerely,

Amazon Watch
Amnesty International
Animals Are Sentient Beings Inc
Asia Indigenous Peoples Network on
Extractive Industries and Energy (AIPNEE)
Bay Area-System Change not Climate
Change
Breach Collective
CASE Citizens Alliance for a Sustainable
Englewood
Center for Constitutional Rights
Climate Defiance
Climate Express
Community Empowerment and Social
Justice Network (CEMSOJ)
Direct Action Everywhere
Earth Ethics. Inc
Eco Action Families
Environment East Gippsland inc
Environmental Defender Law Center
Extinction Rebellion San Francisco Bay
Area
Food & Water Watch
Food Empowerment Project
Friends of the Earth Canada
Gents MilieuFront
Global Justice Ecology Project
Green Mountain Siesta
Green New Deal Network
Greenpeace
Healing Bridges
Indigenous Peoples Rights International
International Marine Mammal Project of
Earth Island Institute
Join For Water

LEF/FGE
Media Alliance
Mighty Earth
NJ State Industrial Union Council
No Business With Genocide
Oil Change International
Oil & Gas Action Network
Pachamama Alliance
Partnership for Civil Justice Fund
Public Citizen
Rainforest Action Network
Rainforest Foundation US
ReCommon
SoCal 350 Climate Action
Sunflower Alliance
Sunrise Movement
Terra Advocati
Unión de Afectados/as por Texaco
(UDAPT)
Union of Concerned Scientists
West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and
Safe Jobs
Zero Waste Maldives