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## USA ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYER MUST BE PARDONED

Steven Donziger, a lawyer and environmental rights defender, successfully represented victims of oil dumping in Ecuador against Chevron. However, Chevron later sued him in the USA. When Donziger refused to hand over his electronic devices to Chevron, citing concerns about attorney-client confidentiality and the safety of his clients, he was convicted of contempt of court. As a result, he was arbitrarily detained for nearly three years under house arrest and spent several months in prison.

President Biden should pardon Steven Donziger and take steps to protect environmental defenders from corporate retaliation.

### **Write to President Biden urging him to:**

- Pardon Mr. Donziger's 2022 Class B federal misdemeanor conviction and ensure that he can continue his work defending human rights without fear of reprisals.

### **Write to:**

President Joseph Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500, USA  
webform\*: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/>  
White House Comment line: (202) 456-1111

*Salutation: Dear President Biden,*

\*\*\*A US-based address is needed for the White House webform. Non-USA action takers, please use AI USA's address when filling out the webform: Amnesty International USA, 311 West 43rd St. 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036 USA

### **And copy:**

His Excellency David Louis Cohen  
Ambassador  
Embassy of the United States of America  
490 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, ON K1N 1G8  
Tel: (613) 238-5335 / 688-5335 (24h) Fax: (613) 688-3082

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

In 1993, Steven Donziger began his journey in environmental justice by joining the legal team representing victims of oil dumping in Ecuador. This case against Chevron Corporation became a landmark due to accusations that Chevron caused one of the worst oil-related environmental disasters in contemporary history.

After years of judicial proceedings, an Ecuadorian court in 2011 found Chevron liable for severe environmental and health damage to the Amazon rainforest and local communities. The court determined that Chevron had deliberately discharged billions of gallons of oil waste onto Indigenous ancestral lands to save costs and ordered the company to pay billions of dollars in damages.

After losing the case in Ecuador, Chevron moved all its assets out of the country to avoid paying damages and threatened the victims with endless litigation unless they dropped their case. Chevron then filed a lawsuit in a US federal court against the plaintiffs, Steven Donziger, other lawyers, NGOs, and experts who supported the case. The judicial proceedings were marred by flaws, leading to Donziger's arbitrary detention. Issues included court bias, disproportionate interference with his liberty, and detention beyond the maximum period for the charges against him.

In 2019, the judge in Donziger's civil case took the extraordinary step of appointing a private law firm as special prosecutors over criminal contempt charges that the US Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York declined to pursue. On August 6, 2019, the judge ordered Donziger to surrender his passport and submit to GPS tracking and home confinement. Respected jurists in the USA and globally condemned the judicial process that led to Donziger's detention. In 2021, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention deemed his detention arbitrary and illegal under international law.

Despite appeals and significant concern, the US government has not responded to the Working Group's opinion. Meanwhile, Chevron continues its legal and public relations attacks against Donziger, highlighting the urgent need for intervention. The case against Donziger is a SLAPP suit (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation), aimed at silencing and intimidating those exposing wrongdoing. SLAPP suits often target journalists, human rights defenders, activists, and academics to silence them and deter other critical voices.

These suits divert attention from environmental or human rights issues to legal defamation cases, draining the financial and psychological resources of their targets. The pressing need for action is evident as Chevron's ongoing efforts to avoid accountability underscore the injustice in Donziger's case.