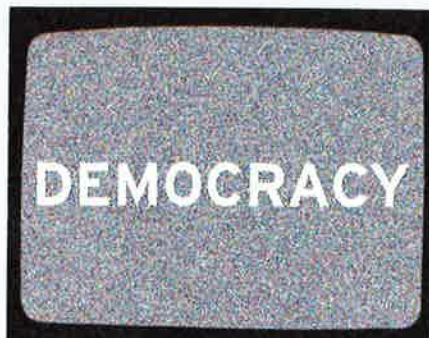


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## Dear Vice President Gore

**A Challenge to the Man Who Would be President: Get Out of Dirty Oil**

I write to you as the girlfriend of Terence Freitas, one of three human rights workers kidnapped and assassinated last March while working with the U'wa indigenous community of oil-rich northeastern Colombia. I write to you from Palawa, Philippines, where I too help provide crucial environmental legal assistance to indigenous communities. I write to remind you of the various roles that you personally have played in the case of Terence and the U'wa.

Just before Terence was killed last year, I re-read *Earth in Balance*, which he and I both had copies of. I re-read with marvel the poignant message you asserted — that policy makers and the general citizenry alike must take into account environmental and social costs of our coveted northern affluence. Proudly, I thought back to the time Terence had met with you in Washington D.C. at a gathering for the 1997 Goldman Environmental Prize recipients. Terence was instrumental in bringing the U'wa struggle against Occidental Petroleum to worldwide attention. He accompanied U'wa leader Roberto Cobarria to your office. How strong a statement of solidarity, for the Vice President of the United States to meet with an indigenous leader from the cloud forest of Colombia, recognizing his people's

adamant resistance to a US multinational oil company: you, Terence, the U'wa leader, standing together in your office.

On February 18, 1999, Terence called from Cubara, Colombia. We discussed whether you could be tapped as a more vocal U'wa ally in the campaign against the pending ecological, cultural, and economic havoc by Occidental Petroleum. We were hopeful about your potential leadership on this pressing environmental case. That phone call was the last time I talked to Terence. One week later, he and his companions were kidnapped by guerrillas allegedly associated with Occidental. One week after that, the bound bodies of these three human rights workers were found, just across the Venezuelan border, splayed and disfigured by rounds of bullets.

Seven months later, I read the *Wall Street Journal's* account of your family's lucrative inheritance from your father of Occidental Petroleum and Occidental subsidiary stock, and your longstanding personal relationship with Occidental directors (9/29/99, editorial page). I am appalled and disheartened to see you, America's leading environmental champion, living the antithesis of your espoused values by continuing to personally profit from Occidental Petroleum's exploits.

I implore you to divest your family from

Occidental Petroleum and answer the requests from the U'wa Defense Working Group — a coalition of US-based environmental and human rights organizations — to explain your position on that company's actions in the U'wa territory of Colombia. Further, I beseech you to engage your peers in Washington, at the development banks, in Bogota and the private sector, in the sincere pursuit of alternatives to military escalation and natural resource exploitation as the means to address Colombia's economic woes. Guns and oil have never spelled sustainable development or peace. Measures such as debt swaps and demonstrated multilateral commitment to Colombia's locally-driven social and economic development would move the country closer to these goals.

Vice President Gore, you should have my vote and that of virtually all of my peers. We are young doctors, ecologists, policy analysts, teachers, historians, artists, journalists, public officials, development workers, and lawyers. We work for environmental and social justice. We should be your constituency. I urge you to demonstrate to us that you deserve it.

*Sincerely, Abby Reyes  
Watsonville, California*