

## **STATEMENTS BY THE PHOTOGRAPHERS**

“As a Native American woman with no link to my own tribe, much of my work is focused on being an advocate for endangered indigenous communities who are struggling to preserve their way of life in the face of irresponsible development projects. I went to the Amazon knowing that I would see the effects of contamination on the environment, culture, and health of the communities living in the wake of Chevron/Texaco oil development. Nevertheless, I was simply unprepared for the level of devastation I encountered— children born with tragic birth defects, toxic oil facilities built in people’s backyards, and indigenous communities facing total cultural loss. I was shocked daily at the depth of the destruction, and became determined to tell the story of those facing it, and resisting it. I have attempted to bear witness to the reality of life in the Ecuadorian Amazon today, and I hope that these photographs will inspire viewers to support the people whose struggle— for livelihood, justice, even survival— continues.”

~Kayana Szymczak

“In 1993, I traveled to the Ecuadorian Amazon to investigate reports of extensive environmental damage and contamination as a result of large-scale oil development. During that trip, a doctor from Ecuador’s Ministry of Health told me that the region was sitting on a time bomb as a result of the toxic contamination dumped and left in the environment by Texaco’s oil drilling and production operations. He told me it would take ten-to-twenty years for cancers to begin manifesting themselves, but then we would see them all over the place. When I returned to the region once again in 2003, after an absence of ten years, I found that the bomb had exploded. Everywhere I turned, it seemed, I encountered people with cancers, birth defects and other serious health problems. I was determined to help give voice to the people who are living this tragedy. I hope that the photographs and testimonies in this exhibit help to do that.”

~Lou Dematteis

### **About the Artists and Journalist**

Award-winning photographer **Lou Dematteis** has spent more than two decades documenting social and political conflict and their consequences in the United States and around the world. A former staff photographer for Reuters, Dematteis has published two books: *Nicaragua: A Decade of Revolution* (W.W. Norton), an anthology of the Sandinista years in Nicaragua, and *A Portrait of Viet Nam* (W.W. Norton), which documents the social and economic transformation of contemporary Vietnam. He has exhibited extensively in the United States and abroad. Dematteis was based in Nicaragua during the war between the Sandinistas and U.S.-backed Contras. In 1986, his photograph of captured U.S. soldier-of-fortune Eugene Hasenfus being led through the jungle by a Sandinista soldier was named one of the top pictures of the year by The New York Times, National Press Photographers Association, and World Press Photo.

**Kayana Szymczak** is a documentary photographer whose work focuses on human rights and environmental justice issues. After graduating from the University of Illinois with a BA in photography, Kayana launched her first photojournalism project in the fall of 2003, traveling to the Narmada Valley in India to document the impact of the world's second largest dam project on local communities. Soon after, Szymczak was awarded a grant from the Titcomb Foundation to document the impacts of oil development on the communities living in the Ecuadorian

Amazon. As a woman of Native American descent with no link to her own tribe, she strives to be an advocate for endangered indigenous communities around the world who are struggling to preserve their land, culture, language, and right to life. This is the first part of a long-term photographic project documenting the impacts of, and resistance to, oil development in communities around the world.

**Joan Kruckewitt** is a journalist who lived in Nicaragua and covered the war between there between the Sandinistas and the Contras. She received her B.A. from U.C. Berkeley and her M.A. in Latin American Studies from Stanford University. She has reported from Latin America and Europe for various radio networks including ABC Radio, Canadian Broadcasting Company and National Public Radio. She is the author of *The Death of Ben Linder; The Story of a North American in Sandinista Nicaragua* (Seven Stories Press, 1999).