

Declaration on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline by civil society organisations

September 2005

On 14 and 15 September 2005, civil society organisations from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and Europe met in Tbilisi, to plan the next phase of their scrutiny of BP's Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.

As the pipeline is soon to begin pumping oil, its environmental and social impacts are set to worsen, so the campaign plans to intensify its efforts to defend local people's human rights, and to hold BP and the project's financial backers to account.

Construction of the project has been proceeding for around two and half years, and has been a disaster for the people and environment of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey.

Whereas a majority of people living on the route supported the pipeline before construction started, persuaded by the promises that it would bring development, now a majority oppose it, having seen those promises broken.

People have lost their land, and with it their livelihood, often with minimal or no compensation. In Georgia, expropriation is still disputed on 30% of land plots. In Azerbaijan, people had to sign compensation documents written in the Latin script, whereas they can only read in Cyrillic. Similarly, in Turkey, many of the expropriation documents were actually in English.

Roads and houses have been damaged by the passing of heavy trucks – mostly unrepaired and uncompensated by BP. Dust from construction activities has damaged people's health and contaminated food production.

International labour standards have been violated in all three countries. Workers from the three countries themselves have been paid a fraction of what foreigners have earned for the same jobs, have been kept in inadequate living conditions, and have been subject to short-term contracts and arbitrary dismissal.

The project has bulldozed through protected areas, and has violated its environmental permits. In the vital Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park in Georgia, through which the pipeline passes, experts still feel that BP has not justified its route selection, nor given any realistic assessment of the risk to the area or to the mineral water produced there.

Yet this is only the start. When the pipeline begins pumping oil in the coming months, its most severe impacts will begin.

Human rights violations are expected as the host states move to defend the pipeline, and critics of the project have already been subject to intimidation and arrest.

Also as the oil starts to flow, a central question will be whether the revenues are distributed accountably and fairly, or whether they will increase corruption and strengthen undemocratic institutions.

Furthermore, communities will face a serious threat from pollution. As has been extensively documented, there have been major flaws in construction standards, including anti-corrosion measures and engineering, which create a high likelihood, and some say an inevitability, of spills.

Therefore, the organisations present at the meeting resolved to increase their efforts to scrutinise the pipeline during the operation phase over the coming years, and to continue to address the many still unresolved problems caused by the construction, as outlined above. Specifically, they agreed to focus on:

- Enhancing systems for monitoring the impacts of the pipeline, both in the three countries and through international fact-finding missions – and publicising these results.
- Helping individuals and communities whose rights have been violated to seek redress, through local, national and international courts and through institutional recourse mechanisms, and to press for proper, independent and accessible mechanisms for redress.
- Examining the broader economic, social and environmental impacts of the pipeline on the three countries.
- Holding to account the companies and financial institutions that backed the pipeline, and pushing for their urgent reform.

The project proponents aim to portray the project as now ‘over’. On the contrary, we civil society organisations believe it is not ‘over’ as long as people’s rights are violated, and as long as the benefits of the pipeline are not shared by those who experience its negative impacts.

In many ways, the campaign is only just beginning.