

# Sisters resident joins indigenous women to defend the Amazon

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When Sisters resident Susan Prince began hearing about oil spills in the pristine rainforests of the Ecuadorian Amazon, she decided to investigate for herself.

And on March 8, 2016, International Women's Day, Prince took action by joining 300 indigenous women from across the Ecuadorian Amazon in a historic march in defense of the Amazon against oil drilling.

"I had first gone on a month-long trip to Ecuador over four years ago with a friend," she recalled. "Global exchange offered a trip called the 'toxic tour.' It's a program where they take people all around the world to places with issues. We were taken on a tour through the part of Ecuador that was destroyed by the oil companies. In the past Texaco had drilled in Ecuador. They created huge leach fields, which are ponds where all the oil goes that leaches out of the pipes. And the ponds aren't lined. The oil was poisoning the rivers and the indigenous people were suffering. After 30 years of this they unified and brought a lawsuit against the oil company and won. However the suit is still unresolved.

"I learned a lot on my first trip, especially from the non-profits that have been supporting the indigenous people and getting the word out to stop drilling."

Prince went a second time

three years ago and explored deeper into the jungle where the forests are still intact and where the indigenous people continue to fight off oil companies.

Ecuador's southern Ecuadorian Amazon has a long history of indigenous resistance, drilling project failures, and oil companies that have abandoned drilling plans.

In January 2016, Ecuador's government sold oil exploration rights in a remote corner of the Amazon rainforest to an assortment of Chinese state-owned oil companies, despite resistance from indigenous groups in the South American country.

"My last trip in March was with Amazon Watch, and we were going into two territories in the southern part of the Amazon," Prince said. "There are large blocks of designated land that the government has opened for drilling. These areas are untouched pristine rain forests."

Amazon Watch works to protect the rainforest by advancing the rights of indigenous peoples. They have helped the people become more unified and stronger.

"I landed in Quito, Ecuador and was met at the airport by Amazon Watch. I stayed at a hotel there, and then 25 of us all got on a bus to Puyo, Ecuador where the march took place," Prince said.

It was the first time that indigenous Amazonian woman from over seven nationalities joined forces and marched together in defense

of their rights, rainforests and future generations.

"We started in Puyo with hundreds of indigenous women and their supporters," Prince said. "We all joined together to protest against the government, who wants to allow the oil drilling. We marched around Puyo for about two hours. It was very hot, but we were grateful for the good media coverage and the women felt empowered."

After the protest Prince and four others took a canoe down the fast-moving Bobonaza River to Sarayaku, a village that played a huge part in the battle. They would hear firsthand from leaders and community members about the Ecuadorian government's aggressive push to open up their lands to new oil drilling. The people of Sarayaku had won a lawsuit against the Ecuadorian oil company which had come in and done exploratory drilling in their territory without their consent.

"We were there as their guests. We ate with them and we stayed all together in a platform building with a roof. It was me along with two women and two men, and we each had our own bed with mosquito netting. The indigenous people are very friendly and appreciative. We learned of their ways and took a tour of their medicinal garden," Prince said.

Then Prince boarded a three-passenger Cessna that landed on an airstrip filled with weeds and rocks in the



PHOTO PROVIDED

Susan Prince participated in demonstrations against oil drilling in South America.

Amazon Basin, surrounded by mountains.

"We were in Zapara, which is one of the most primitive areas, no flushing toilets, no privacy and the beds were made out of straw," Prince said. "We stayed there for three days and then flew to Shell, Ecuador, got into a van and went from sea level up to 11,000 feet in one day in the Andes. We stayed at a beautiful hot springs up there, which was in the cloud forest."

What Prince and others heard from the indigenous people repeatedly during their trip to Southern Ecuador was their adamant opposition to oil and other natural-resource extraction, and how they would continue defending their lives, land and cultures.

Manari, a Sapara leader, explained it to Prince and others like this: "Our forest is full of spirits. These spirits maintain the balance of life in the forest. We must listen to

them to defend the forest. If we do not, the balance of life will be altered and we will not survive."

"We then journeyed back to Quito, which is a big city at 10,000 ft., and stayed for two days before leaving," Prince said.

"I want people to know what's going on in the Ecuadorian Amazon and I want them to know what is in danger of being lost forever and that we can make a difference," Prince told *The Nugget*. "We can support Amazon Watch, and the other organizations that are helping to keep these people strong. On a larger scale we all need to keep talking about the impact of fossil fuels in the environment. There are people behind the scenes creating electric cars and bio fuels, there are alternatives. We need to save our environment."

For more information go to [www.amazonwatch.org](http://www.amazonwatch.org)



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