

ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ENVIRONMENTAL FAILURE?

*The other day
We danced in the street
Joy in our hearts
We thought we were free
Three young folks fell to our right
Countless more fell to our left
Looking up,
Far from crowd
We beheld
Red-hot guns*

*We thought it was oil
But it was blood.*

FROM "WE THOUGHT IT WAS OIL
BUT IT WAS BLOOD," BY NNIMMO BASSEY

Earth: Too big to fail. That's the theme of this year's Public Interest Environmental Law Conference (PIELC) Feb. 28 through March 3 at the University of Oregon. But perhaps we should be asking the question: Are we failing the Earth? The beginning of the modern environmental movement is often dated to Rachel Carson's 1962 *Silent Spring*, but from the more radical Deep Green Resistance to the attorneys from the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, some are starting to question whether the planet is any better off than it was in the '60s and ask conservationists to do things differently.

PIELC this year reflects those perspectives and more. Keynote speaker Nnimmo Bassey of Nigeria fights environmental degradation and human rights abuses with lawsuits and with poetry. Fellow keynoter Thuli Brilliance Makama of Swaziland (one of only two female keynoters this year) faces backlash in her country not only for her activism but also for being a woman. Panels range from wonky talks on administrative petitions to discussions of direct action, and all of them reflect the diversity of perspectives on how to protect ecosystems from coal, tar sands and a myriad of other threats. The Willamette Valley only gets this international confluence of activists, legal minds and action in one place, at one time, once a year. For a full schedule (registration is free, donations are possible) go to pielc.org and don't miss the march against resource extraction at 1 pm on Sunday, March 3, kicking off at the Erb Memorial Union on campus. — Camilla Mortensen

Fighting for Africa

Local rights versus multinational corporations WORDS BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN • PHOTOS BY TRASK BEDORTHA

Biofuels, wildlife preserves, a community's access to clean water: These are the kinds of issues we think of as social and environmental positives, but these same seemingly good things can be wielded like clubs and injure Africa's indigenous populations, who are often forced off their ancestral lands by governments and multinational corporations.

Thuli Brilliance Makama of Swaziland and Elifuraha Laltaika, a Maasai from Tanzania, are geographically far apart on the continent of Africa, with Laltaika in East Africa and Makama in the south, but they are fighting many of the same environmental and social justice battles against corporations and sometimes their own governments.

Makama and Laltaika, together with a score of other public interest law attorneys from around the world, are meeting up in Eugene this week, through the Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide, and speaking about their battles at the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference. Laltaika is the executive director of the Association for Law and Advocacy for Pastoralists (ALAPA) in Tanzania and is at the University of Oregon on a Fulbright fellowship. Makama is the executive director of Yonge Nawe Environmental Action Group (Friends of Earth Swaziland) and has come to Oregon through ELAW. Both will be speaking at PIELC and Makama is a keynote speaker.

SWAZILAND

Thuli Makama isn't just fighting corporations such as the Koch Brothers, she's fighting her own government, which is ruled by a king in addition to the presence of a legislative and judicial system, and she's fighting the people who say to her as a woman, "Where's your father? Who is your husband?" she says.

Makama won the prestigious 2010 Goldman Environmental Prize for her work in Swaziland, where she has fought to ensure that local voices are heard when the country makes environmental decisions, such as when a minister of the environment illegally excluded environmental nongovernment organizations from the

Management Board of the Swaziland Environment Authority. Makama and Yonge Nawe won the case.

Threats come not only from corporations like the U.S.-based Koch Brothers but also from entities that say they are there to protect the environment. One private company, Big Game Parks, owns or operates many of Swaziland's preserves, and when it took over the land, it kicked off the people who had historically lived there and depended on the land. Those who hunt for sustenance are called poachers, while those who have the money can come in to trophy hunt.

"The evolution from preservation to sustainability is not happening fast enough," Makama says. "Local people, their

voices are somehow becoming drowned in the discussion at political levels and at legislative levels." She says that "the scales are weighed against the man who does not have much money and who is not sophisticated enough to maneuver around" the way the government and courts are set up.

The corporations come in and promise "jobs," she says, when the people are asked to let go of what they depend on for survival — access to land and water. "The question is why can someone go from being an owner to being an employee?"

Multinational corporations are given *carte blanche*, she says, and the government handles them with kid gloves.



THULI MAKAMA