

March 24, 2015

Dr. Gloria C. Duffy  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
The Commonwealth Club

Dear Dr. Duffy:

We, the undersigned organizations, call upon the Commonwealth Club to rescind its 2015 “Distinguished Citizen Award” for Chevron CEO John Watson. The decision to bestow this award to Mr. Watson is an affront not only to the ideals of the Commonwealth Club but also to the tens of thousands of people in communities in Ecuador and around the world affected by Chevron’s deliberate and reckless acts of environmental destruction. In Ecuador specifically, Chevron’s utter abuse of the pristine rainforest environment – which includes the dumping of billions of gallons of oil waste into the waterways relied on by local inhabitants for their sustenance – has been verified by multiple independent media reports, academic studies, and witness testimonies. It also has been affirmed by three layers of courts in Chevron’s chosen forum of Ecuador, including the country’s Supreme Court which found the company liable for \$9.5 billion of clean-up costs in a unanimous decision issued in 2013.

The award of the Commonwealth Club is supposed to recognize those who have made significant contributions to the global community. Mr. Watson does not come close to living up to that ideal. For example:

- In Richmond, where Chevron has a refinery that has caused extensive pollution and finally exploded due to lax safety standards causing 15,000 citizens to seek medical care, Mr. Watson ordered the unprecedented expenditure of millions of dollars to try to manipulate a local election in favor of a slate of pro-Chevron candidates.
- In Ecuador, a Chevron executive – Rodrigo Perez Pallares – admitted the company dumped 15 billion gallons of toxic waste into waterways from which many indigenous groups drink, fish, and bathe. Yet rather than remediate its contamination, Chevron has promised to fight a court judgment “until hell freezes over” and then “fight it out on the ice” if the affected villagers persist in pursuing compensation.
- In the United States, Chevron used 60 law firms to launch an unprecedented retaliation strategy targeting more than 100 people (including many of the undersigned groups) who had helped to hold it accountable for its contamination in Ecuador. Under Mr. Watson’s theory, protected speech targeting Chevron with criticism for its Ecuador disaster is part of a criminal “racketeering” conspiracy worthy of punishment. Mr. Watson has demonstrated by his actions that he has no

respect for the core American value of Free Speech – at least the kind of speech that exposes Chevron for its bad acts.

- Mr. Watson and Chevron have become pariahs in the international community. Earlier this year, the company won an embarrassing [“lifetime achievement” award from the Public Eye](#) for corporate abuse. That was after several health studies conducted in Ecuador confirmed thousands of people had either contracted cancer or were at risk of contracting cancer because of exposure to the company's contamination.
- In 2014, more than 40 civil society groups in the United States wrote an [open letter](#) criticizing Chevron's efforts to abuse the legal system to silence its critics with harassing lawsuits. In addition, Chevron was targeted last year with same-day protests in twenty countries around the world because of its sub-standard operational practices that continue to negatively impact communities.
- Because of these improper actions, Mr. Watson himself has been the target of a [complaint filed before the International Criminal Court in the Hague](#) alleging that under his leadership Chevron has violated international human rights norms.

Each year, despite making a mockery of the rule of law in many of the communities where Chevron operates, Mr. Watson receives approximately \$30 million in compensation from a Board of Directors of which he is the chairperson. It is shocking that the Commonwealth Club would even consider honoring an oil company executive who has “distinguished” himself primarily for his near total lack moral compass across so many issues of public importance.

If the Commonwealth Club does not rescind this inappropriate award, it will dishonor its own tradition and bring disrepute on an organization with a proud history of community service. We would urge you to reconsider this decision forthwith.

Signatories:

Amazon Watch  
Asia Pacific Environmental Network  
Burmese American Democratic Alliance  
Center for Environmental Health  
Chevron Watch  
Climate Justice Alliance  
ClimateMama  
Communities for a Better Environment, Richmond  
CounterCorp  
Earthworks  
Family Farm Defenders  
Food & Water Watch  
Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives

Global Exchange  
Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights  
Grassroots International  
Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice  
Indigenous Environmental Network  
Institute for Policy Studies, Climate Policy Program  
International Accountability Project  
Justice in Nigeria Now  
Labor Network for Sustainability  
Marin Interfaith Task Force on the Americas  
Media Alliance  
Movement Generation  
The Pachamama Alliance  
PODER  
Rainforest Action Network  
Richmond Progressive Alliance  
Right To The City Alliance  
Rights Action (USA & Canada)  
Rising Tide North America  
Social Action  
Sunflower Alliance  
Texas Environmental Justice Advocacy Services  
Unitarian Universalist Ministry for the Earth  
WALHI-Friends of the Earth Indonesia  
350 Bay Area

Cc: Commonwealth Club Board of Directors & other award recipients