

Trader Trafigura Tries to Settle Ivorian Waste Case

ABIDJAN, Côte d'Ivoire (AMSTERDAM, Netherlands (Reuters)—International commodities trader Trafigura said on Sunday it had reached a settlement with thousands of people in Ivory Coast who said they had fallen ill from toxic waste dumped around the economic capital Abidjan.

Each of the 31,000 claimants represented by British law firm Leigh Day and Co. would be entitled to damages of about 950 pounds (\$1,553), Trafigura board director Eric de Turckheim said.

Trafigura said the settlement was in no way an admission of liability. An Ivorian group representing the victims said it rejected the offer, and accused the company of exploiting Africa's poverty to end the row and avoid taking responsibility.

Trafigura, one of the world's biggest commodities traders with offices in Geneva, Amsterdam, and London, has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing in relation to the 2006 incident, when slops from a cargo ship it had chartered were dumped in Abidjan, the main city in Ivory Coast.

Trafigura said in a statement that Leigh Day and Co. had accepted that experts were unable to identify a link between the slops deposited and any deaths, miscarriages, still births, or other serious injuries.

The slops "could at worst have caused a range of short-term, low-level flu-like symptoms and anxiety," it said. Lawyers at Leigh Day and Co. could not be reached for comment.

De Turckheim, a co-founder of Trafigura, said the settlement vindicated the firm's stance that the toxic waste did not cause any deaths.

'NOT FAIR'

But the Ivorian National Federation of Victims of Toxic Waste, which says it represents nearly all the victims, accused Trafigura of trying to push through the agreement to avert a class action case due to be heard in a London court next month.

"Trafigura wants to excuse itself morally but it is not fair," Denis Pipira Yao, the group's president, told Reuters.

"The waste was toxic and lethal. Trafigura is proposing 750,000 CFA francs (\$1,683) for each victim," he said. "As people are poor in Africa, Trafigura is using money to get away with it. We are not at all happy with this way of doing business and we will work with our lawyers to make it clear."

It was not clear why the compensation figure he cited was different from that stated by Trafigura.

De Turckheim declined to respond directly to Yao's comments, saying Trafigura's settlement was with the 31,000 claimants represented by Leigh Day and Co.

Leigh Day and Co. said in a statement that in the last few weeks it had been exploring the possibility of settling the claims with Trafigura.

"We have reached a point where we are now in the process of putting a global deal to the claimants," Martyn Day said.

Trafigura hired a contractor in 2006 to dispose of slops from a ship it had chartered, the Probo Koala. It described the petrochemical waste as residues from gasoline, mixed with caustic washings.

Trafigura said in a press release that the settlement was "in no way an acceptance of liability," but a sign of its social and economic



TOXIC WASTE: People at the Akouedo dump in Abidjan, where toxic waste was found dumped in March of 2006. The toxic sludge, allegedly brought into Ivory Coast by the Probo Koala, a Panamanian-registered cargo ship operated by Trafigura, killed 16 people and caused an estimated 95,000 people to seek medical attention. KAMBOU SIA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

commitment to the region.

"Trafigura also recognises that the slops had a deeply unpleasant smell and their illegal dumping ... caused distress to the local

population," it said.

A United Nations report last week said that on the face of it, there was a strong link between the waste and the deaths of at least 15 people and

illness suffered by thousands more.

Trafigura called the report "deeply flawed."

The company agreed to a \$198 million out-of-court settlement

with the Ivory Coast government in 2007, which exempts it from legal proceedings in the West African country.



RELEASE: "We have a common language," says Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as one of the two leopards to be released into the wild snarled at him from a cage in Sochi, home of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games. ALEXEY DRUZHININ/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Russia's Putin Brings Leopards Back to Caucasus

SOCHI, Russia (Reuters)—Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin released two leopards into the wild on September 19 in a bid to revive the fortunes of the rare cats in the Caucasus and soothe ecological worries over 2014 Sochi Games.

Caucasian or Persian leopards disappeared from the Caucasus in the 1920s due to excessive hunting.

Turkmen President Kurbanguly Berdimuhamedov sent two male leopards caught in Turkmenistan by plane to Sochi. Female leopards are to follow.

"We are standing here and admiring your animals. Glorious animals, very beautiful," Putin, surrounded by International Olympic Committee members, told Berdimuhamedov by telephone as he stood by the cage in the Sochi national park.

Russia won the right to host 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi and major construction works are about to begin.

Critics say huge construction projects may harm the environment. They question the need for spending billions of dollars on the Games during a financial crisis and say they do not believe all the infrastructure would be ready by 2014.

"I think Russia is on its way to organizing an exceptional Olympic Games," French Alpine skiing legend

and IOC member Jean-Claude Killy told reporters.

Russia's most popular politician, Putin, enjoys a tough guy image, being photographed riding bare-chested on horse back, fishing in Siberia or saving tigers in Russia's Far East.

Putin stared in silence at one of the leopards, which initially refused to abandon his traveling cage, visibly stressed after its long journey.

"Good boy," Putin said as the cat snarled at him and jumped out while guards and reporters pulled back. "We have found common language, they understand me," said Putin.

The leopards will gradually move to a larger fenced area of the park before they are released into the wild. Scientists plan to bring female leopards at a later stage and hope some 30-50 cats will be living around Sochi in six years.

Environment Briefs

The Generator

YES MEN TERRIFY NEW YORK WITH THE TRUTH ON CLIMATE CHANGE

A million copies of a "special edition" New York Post warning that the Big Apple faces deadly heat waves, extreme flooding, and other lethal effects of global warming were distributed by 2000 volunteers working for the Yes Men. The paper appeared one day before a UN summit where Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon will push 100 world leaders to make serious commitments to reduce carbon emissions. Everything in the fake 32-page New York Post is 100% true, carefully checked by a team of editors and climate change experts. "This could be, and should be, a real New York Post," said Andy Bichlbaum of the Yes Men. "Climate change is the biggest threat civilization has ever faced, and it should be in the headlines of every paper, every day until we solve the problem."

EXXON MOBIL PREDICTS ALGAL JET FUEL IN FIVE YEARS

Representatives of a \$US600 billion project run by Exxon Mobil predict that jet planes could be flying on jet fuel harvested from algae within five years. The project involves fast growing genetically modified algae that deliver about 40 percent of their body weight as fatty acids suitable for refining into fuel. The advantage of algae

as a fuel source is that it can be farmed in sea water and so does not compete with existing food sources, unlike biofuels generated from crops such as sugar and corn. One of the challenges of harvesting the oil from the algae is that it consumes energy or requires time both of which add to the cost of making the fuel. Despite this "algae is the only green fuel with the potential to provide the huge quantities of renewable oil required," said Dr. Yusuf Chisti, from Massey University in New Zealand.

CITY DWELLERS HAVE LOWER FOOTPRINTS THAN THEIR COUNTRY COUSINS

A report from the International Institute for Environment and Development released last week indicates that city dwellers emit an average of two thirds the emissions of those who live in cities. Larger cities and their transport networks tend to be more efficient, but the details depend on a large number of factors. Residents of Rio de Janeiro, for example, emit about one third of the national greenhouse gases average per person. The report notes that by 2050 more than half the world's populations will live in cities and concludes that making those cities as sustainable as possible will be one of the key factors in reducing greenhouse emissions."

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