



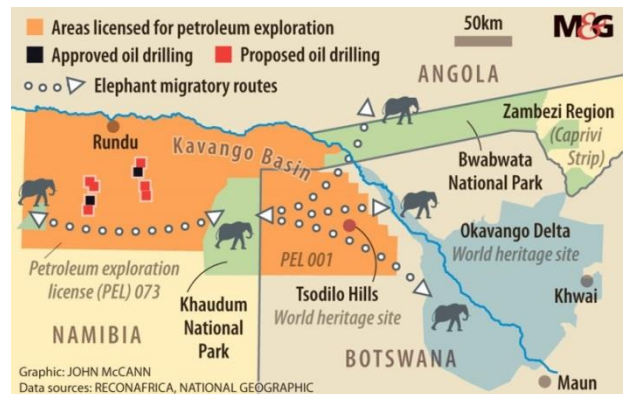
## Backgrounder – Okavango Delta Campaign

### How would you feel if a foreign oil and gas company started drilling for oil in your backyard, turning you out of your house and polluting your whole neighbourhood?

This is exactly what a Canadian company, Reconnaissance Energy Africa Ltd. (ReconAfrica), which is based in Vancouver, is about to do to the people of Namibia and Botswana. They have secured petroleum licenses for 8.75 million acres of land upstream from the Okavango Delta, an area of rich and unique biodiversity that has been designated a [UNESCO World Heritage site](#). The company has publicly stated that it will not employ fracking, but has told a different story to its investors and has hired a fracking expert to their team.<sup>1</sup> (Fracking is a drilling technique that uses vast amounts of high-pressure water mixed with sand and chemicals to fracture shale rock underground to release gas and oil. It poses multiple threats to water sources, air quality, and public health.) As well as the potential environmental damage and the threat to the livelihoods of local residents, extracting and burning more fossil fuel on this scale will accelerate the global climate crisis.

### Surely the Governments of Namibia and Botswana will not allow this to happen?

Both of these governments have given their permission for exploratory work, and drilling has already started in Namibia. Although the oil and the majority of the profits are destined for ReconAfrica, the governments of both Namibia and Botswana and ReconAfrica employees are embarking on an aggressive campaign to convince the citizens of these countries of the benefits of this project.



### What impact will this drilling have?



Flocks of many different bird species congregate in this area when the delta floods.

The Okavango Delta is Africa's largest inland delta, located adjacent to the Kalahari Desert. It floods annually with life-sustaining waters needed by the San people who are indigenous to the Kalahari. It also attracts some of the greatest concentrations of wildlife, including elephants, lions, an amazing variety of birds, and several endangered species such as wild dogs. Any disruption to this water supply would have devastating effects in these arid countries and imperil the already precarious food supply from the 600 working farms in this area. It will also have a direct impact on the human rights of the San people. They have been forcibly removed from their

ancestral lands in the past, and are afraid this will happen again. Women and children are disproportionately impacted by these forced displacements and the loss of arable land.

Already there are credible reports of drilling taking place on their land without consent or compensation. Any oil spill would be disastrous, not only to the environment and animals, but also to the land-based economy, fishing, and tourism, which employs many local people and helps to preserve this part of wild Africa. Tourism presently brings in \$500 million a year in sustainable revenue and is the sole source of livelihood for many people.



Packs of wild dogs, which are an endangered species, call the delta home.

### Why are the local people not protesting?



Photo credit: African Centre for Biodiversity

The San people walked from the Western Cape to the Namibian diplomatic mission in Cape Town in protest.

The San people have sent letters and a petition to the governments of Botswana and Namibia, and have also organized protests and walks. Their voices are not being heard. There has been minimal consultation with them, although the Namibian and Canadian governments are both signatories to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples (UNDRIP).

Environmentalists have been expressing their concern for months and have been heartened by the strong statements of support they have received from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

### What recourse is there in Canada?

In 2018 the Canadian government announced the creation of the office of Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE), with a promise that it would have the powers to independently investigate human rights abuses linked to Canadian companies operating overseas. However, the government subsequently reneged on this commitment. While CORE started receiving complaints in March 2021, it has none of the promised powers, and must rely on companies to voluntarily do the right thing. We know from decades of experience that voluntary measures to hold powerful corporations accountable for their actions do not work. Asking local human rights defenders to make complaints to a Canadian office that cannot properly investigate puts them at risk. Until CORE is given the powers it needs to do its work, it is an ombudsperson in name only.

### Why should we as GRAN members be concerned?

GRAN's Climate Strategy and Mining Justice Working Groups have joined up to work on this project because it relates directly to the common concerns of both groups.

This drilling project is expected to produce up to 120 billion barrels of oil. This equates to approximately 5 billion tons of carbon dioxide, which will make a significant contribution to global warming. Exploiting these fossil fuel reserves would run directly counter to the Paris Accord, to which Botswana, Namibia and Canada are all signatories. Signatories to this accord agree to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, increase renewable energy and increase energy efficiency. This project works against all these objectives and is leading us in exactly the wrong direction.



Elephants drinking at a waterhole in the Okavango Delta.

The project also threatens the human rights of the San people -- and all the people of Namibia and Botswana -- who have a right to consultation, to defend their land and culture, to have access to adequate water free of contamination, and to speak without fear of retribution.

### What can GRANs do?

GRAN is working in partnership with the [Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability](#) and the Canada-Okavango Solidarity Group, a coalition of Canadian, African, and international environmental and social justice civil society organizations. We need to make the public, both in Canada and in African countries, aware of how appallingly destructive this project promises to be. We are hoping that widespread publicity will discourage potential investors. (ReconAfrica is a small company and relies on attracting outside investment.) Investors need to be encouraged to turn away from oil and invest in renewable energy. We are hoping to get this entire project stopped, or at least to prevent the issuing of licenses to move into production.

We will also renew our advocacy to urge the Government of Canada to invest the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise (CORE) with the necessary powers to investigate Canadian companies working abroad, such as ReconAfrica.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from Nick Steinsberger, the fracking expert hired by ReconAfrica: "[The Barnett Shale] *is indeed where modern-day fracking began. Now, I'm hoping for something just as exciting in Namibia's Kavango Basin.*"