
Nominated for the Public Eye Global Award 2007
by La Plate Forme Sociale pour la Paix en Côte d'Ivoire, Ivory Coast

Trafigura Beheer B.V.

Headquarters:	Lucerne, Switzerland (domiciled in the Netherlands)
Branch of trade:	Commodity trading (crude oil, petroleum products, metals)
Turnover / Profit:	US\$ 28.4 billion / n.n. (2005)
CEO:	n.n.
Owned by:	Privately-owned corporation
Employees:	n.n.

Summary

In August 2006, a ship chartered by Trafigura Ltd.¹ unloaded deadly cargo in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Toxic waste in the form of a foul-smelling sludge was openly deposited at several dumping sites around the city by a local waste handling firm. The sludge contained toxic volatile chemicals which led to at least six casualties. Tens of thousands were forced to seek medical treatment according to local authorities. Many circumstances of the case are not yet known and, as of December 2006, the incident is still under investigation. The secretive nature of Trafigura promises to hamper further inquiries. On behalf of claimants from Abidjan, British lawyers have filed claims in London.

Irresponsible corporate behaviour

On 19 August 2006, the MV Probo Koala, a vessel chartered by Trafigura Ltd. and sailing under Panamanian flag, unloaded 500 tons of slops in Abidjan, the economic capital of the Ivory Coast. The Ivorian Société Tommy, contracted by Trafigura for the disposal of the slops, dumped the liquid waste at several open sites around the city. This scandal only came to light on 6 September 2006, when the first casualties became known. According to local authorities, six people have died from exposure and ten thousands have sought medical treatment for respiratory problems, nausea, dizziness, vomiting and burns.

The Ivorian Anti Pollution Centre (CIAPOL) established that the sludge dumped in Abidjan contained large amounts of hydrocarbons and was contaminated with hydrogen sulphide and mercaptans, chemicals which are toxic, gaseous or highly volatile, and foul-smelling. Exposure to high levels of these chemicals can cause nausea and respiratory disorders.

According to Greenpeace, Trafigura's claim that they thought the waste would be properly treated and disposed of in a developing African country raises serious questions about why they sent it to Africa in the first place. It is known that on 2 July 2006, the MV Probo Koala arrived in Amsterdam to discharge the slops. But due to unexpected additional costs for the treatment of the waste, Trafigura decided to leave for Estonia without disposing the slops. From there, the ship carried

¹ Trafigura Ltd. is a subsidiary of Trafigura Beheer B.V.

gasoline to Nigeria, eventually sailing to Abidjan. According to Trafigura, the slops originated from common on-board operations such as the cleaning of the gasoline tanks and contained caustic soda, gasoline residues and water.

Consequences

The same day the toxic waste dumping was made public, the Ivorian Ministry of Health announced an extraordinary cabinet meeting in response to street protests against the government which was blamed for allowing the dumping. The scandal resulted in the resignation of the entire Ivorian government which was in the process of rebuilding and still fragile after years of civil war.

The MV Probo Koala left Abidjan on 22 August 2006 and arrived at Paldiski in Estonia on 15 September 2006 where the vessel was later blocked by the Greenpeace ship MV Arctic Sunrise. Requests from the Ivorian to the Estonian government to seize the Probo Koala and a visit from the EU Commissioner for the Environment, Stavros Dimas, resulted in the ship's immobilization, allowing for investigations by Estonian authorities. Trafigura claims to have fully co-operated with Estonian and Ivorian investigators. After the Estonian public prosecutor's office announced that the Probo Koala was free to leave Paldiski harbour, the vessel departed Estonia on 16 October 2006. During the course of the investigations, Trafigura's director, Claude Dauphin, and Jean-Pierre Valentini, the company's West Africa manager, were arrested in Abidjan on 18 September 2006. They are still being held in prison. Two responsible Ivorian collaborators have also been arrested. Obviously, this mess could not have happened without public and private local complicity.

Current status and demands

On 8 November 2006, on the basis that Trafigura was negligent and that this and the nuisance resulting from its actions caused the deaths and injuries of people in Abidjan, claims have been commenced in the High Court in London, the company's operational centre. Trafigura is facing a £ 100 million claim for compensation over allegations that it arranged to dump 500 tons of toxic waste in Abidjan. Dutch authorities are also investigating the scandal.

La Plate Forme Sociale pour la Paix en Côte d'Ivoire (a network of fifteen human rights and women's rights groups; youth, education, and environmental organizations; and labour unions) is calling for a transparent and thorough investigation of all aspects of the toxic waste dumping by the respective international and local authorities, and has issued a petition to the EU and its member states. The EU is a signatory of the Basel Convention which regulates the generation, trade, and disposal of hazardous wastes and prohibits the export of toxic waste from the EU to non-OECD countries such as the Ivory Coast.

Environmental lawyers from all over Africa are fighting ecological crisis caused by toxic waste dumping. They have spoken out on the incident to call attention to national and international laws and regulations which govern transboundary movements of toxic and hazardous wastes.

Further information:

- www.greenpeace.org
- www.iucn.org/places/brao/docs_pdf/d%C3%A9claration_juristes_environnement.pdf
- www.terredeshommes.asso.fr/docs/petition_dechets_toxiques_Abidjan.html
- www.trafigura.com