

7b The minister for no oil

The Minister FOR NO OIL

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One thing you do not expect an oil minister to do is to block the development of his own country's oil fields. But that is exactly what Alberto Acosta did when he was appointed Ecuador's Oil Minister in 2007.

For a relatively poor country whose main income is from oil exports, this proposal seemed like madness. But if Ecuador is not rich by economic standards, in terms of biodiversity, it is one of the richest places on Earth. When scientists studied trees in the Yasuni National Park in Ecuador's unspoiled rain forest, they found over 650 different species of tree in just one hectare – more than the total number in all of the US and Canada combined.

Mr Acosta said he would rather the oil companies did not destroy these natural riches. His innovative idea was to leave the oil reserves beneath Yasuni Park untouched, in return for compensation of half their value. The oil is worth more than \$7 billion, so Ecuador asked the international community to pay \$3.6 billion not to extract it.

But the plan has met with problems, both from within Ecuador and from outside. The state oil company, Petroecuador, opposes the scheme and many suspect that President Correa now wishes he had never supported it. At the same time only a few countries have shown interest, with only Germany promising \$800 million over thirteen years.

Ecuador is not the only country trying to get richer nations to pay for not exploiting their forests. Both Nigeria and Guatemala are hoping they will be able to make similar deals. A spokesperson for local environmental groups explained, 'This is a fantastic initiative. If only people in developed countries appreciated that these forests absorb a lot of the CO₂ that their industries produce. I just wish they would take a longer-term view of this problem. If we don't do something to protect biodiversity and prevent climate change, we will all be losers – with consequences I'd rather not even think about.'

Vocabulary oil

- 1 How many of these expressions do you know? Which is shown in the photo above?

oil field oil refinery oil reserves oil rig
oil slick oil tanker oil well

▶ WORDBUILDING collocations related to one word

There are some nouns that have many words that collocate with them.

oil well, oil tanker, oil field

For further information and practice, see Workbook page 103.

- 2 Work in pairs. Discuss the questions.

- How much is a litre of petrol in your country?
- Are people more careful these days about how they conserve oil or petrol?

Reading

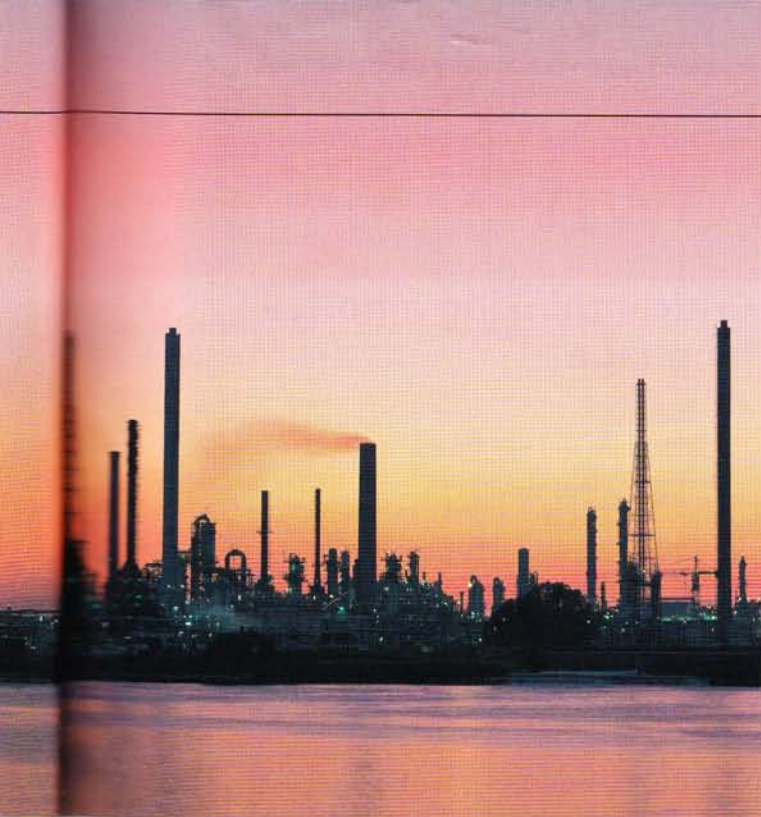
- 3 Look at the sentences (a–c). Then read the article and choose the sentence that best summarises Acosta's idea.

- for Ecuador to use money from oil exports to protect its forests
- for Ecuador to be paid not to extract its oil
- for Ecuador to keep the oil underground until it really needs the money

- 4 Answer the questions.

- Why did Acosta's proposal seem like madness?
- In what way was the price Acosta asked other countries to pay a fair one?
- What has been the reaction of the international community to the plan?
- What has been the reaction of local environmental groups?

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- 5 Complete these statements using words from the article. Use one word per space.
- Ecuador's riches are in its _____.
 - In Yasuni park, Ecuador has oil _____ worth \$7 billion.
 - The main opposition to the plan in Ecuador comes from _____.
 - There are other countries who would like to be paid not to _____ their natural resources.
 - People in the developed world don't _____ the part played by the forests in preventing climate change.
 - People need to think about what will happen in the _____ - _____.
- 6 Work in pairs. What do you think of Acosta's idea? Is it helpful for Ecuador? Is it unrealistic?

Grammar *wish, would rather and if only*

► WISH, WOULD RATHER and IF ONLY

Wish about a present situation

wish + noun/pronoun + past simple

Wish about a past situation

wish + noun/pronoun + past perfect

Wish for someone to do something about a present situation

wish + noun/pronoun + *would*

NB subject of *wish* and noun/pronoun cannot be the same

Strong wishes about a present or past situation

Use *if only* in place of *I wish*

Stating what you would prefer to do

would rather + infinitive

Stating what you would prefer someone else to do

would rather + object + past simple

For further information and practice, see page 84.

- 7 Look at the grammar box. Look at these sentences from the article. Then choose the option that describes the actual situation.
- Mr Acosta said he would rather the oil companies did not destroy these natural riches. The oil companies *destroy* / *don't destroy* these natural riches.
 - President Correa now wishes he had never supported it. President Correa *supported* / *didn't support* it.
 - If only people in developed countries appreciated that these forests absorb a lot of the CO₂ that their industries produce. People in developed countries *appreciate* / *don't appreciate* that these forests absorb a lot of the CO₂ that their industries produce.
 - I just wish they would take a longer-term view of this problem. They *will* / *won't* take a longer-term view of this problem.
- 8 Choose the correct form to complete the sentences below.
- I wish people *stopped* / *would stop* complaining about the price of petrol these days.
 - I wish they *didn't cut down* / *hadn't cut down* those trees in the park to make a playground.
 - Would you rather *walk* / *walked* or would you prefer we *go* / *went* in the car?
 - Most oil companies wish they *had* / *would have* the freedom to extract oil from wherever they wanted.
 - If only we *didn't have* / *wouldn't have* to rely on our cars so much, but that's the problem with living in the countryside.
 - If only I *could speak* / *would speak* better Spanish. Then I might try to get a job in Ecuador.
 - Sophie wishes that she *had taken* / *would take* a job with BP when she had the chance. She'd much rather *work* / *worked* for them than her present company.
 - I wish people *woke up* / *would wake up* to the problems of climate change.

Speaking

- 9 Look at these situations and make two sentences for each one with *wish*, *if only* or *would rather*. Then read your sentences to your partner.
- Your car is old and uses a lot of petrol. You don't have enough money to buy a new one.
 - You would like to travel more, but the company you work for only gives you three weeks holiday a year.
 - Your journey to work takes you one hour by train each day. As a result you never get home before seven in the evening. You never have time to do any exercise, which you would love to do.