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Ecuador court upholds \$9.5-bn damages ruling against Chevron

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ECUADOR'S highest court has upheld in a ruling released on Tuesday a \$9.5 billion (Bt316 billion) damages award against oil giant Chevron over decades of pollution that harmed indigenous people.

But the decision by the Constitutional Court is largely symbolic because Chevron now owns no assets in Ecuador, meaning the country will have to keep pressing its case in foreign courts.

In a ruling dated June 27 and released on Tuesday, the court said "there is no violation of the constitutional rights" of Chevron in throwing out its appeal of a lower Supreme Court ruling against it in 2013.

Chevron was sentenced in Ecuador over environmental damage blamed on Texaco, which Chevron acquired in 2001, in this country's rainforest during oil operations from 1964 to 1990.

Chevron did not deny that pollution had occurred. But the company blamed it on state-run Petroecuador, with which Texaco worked in a consortium, and has refused to pay the settlement on the grounds that it was the result of fraud and bribes.

Chevron spokesman James Craig said in an email to AFP that the upholding of the damages award "is consistent with the pattern of denial of justice, fraud and corruption against Chevron in Ecuador".

A lawyer for the plaintiffs said Chevron cannot appeal the court's decision.