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Trafigura found guilty in toxic waste dumping tragedy

Amnesty International today welcomed the guilty verdict by a Dutch court against the multinational company, Trafigura, for delivering hazardous waste to Amsterdam while concealing the true nature of the waste, and for exporting the waste to Cote D'Ivoire.

Today's verdict is the first time the company has been held criminally accountable for its involvement in exporting the hazardous waste to Cote d'Ivoire.

"This judgement appears damning given Trafigura's previous denials of any wrongdoing. The waste, which was ultimately dumped in Cote d'Ivoire, had a huge impact on the lives of tens of thousands of people," said Benedetta Lacey, a special advisor at Amnesty International who has visited Côte d'Ivoire and met victims of the dumping.

"While the ruling is a significant step forward, this is not the end of the story for those affected. There are unanswered questions about the impact that the waste may have had on people's health, and the areas where the waste was dumped are yet to be fully decontaminated."

The verdict also appears to raise serious questions about the failures of the Dutch authorities, who could have prevented the tragedy by stopping the waste from leaving Dutch borders. These questions have not been resolved. Amnesty International is assessing the full text of the final verdict.

In July 2006, Trafigura off-loaded waste from a ship in Amsterdam for disposal, but for cost reasons reloaded and transported the waste to Cote d'Ivoire.

The waste was then dumped in August 2006 in various locations around the city of Abidjan. Following the dumping, more than 100,000 people sought medical attention for a range of health problems and there were 15 reported deaths.

The Dutch prosecution focussed on events in the Netherlands. It does not appear to consider the impact of the dumping in Cote D'Ivoire, reflecting the challenges of prosecuting companies for actions that cross borders.

"There is an urgent need for the international community to learn the lessons from this incident. States must do more to ensure that multinationals respect human rights both at home and abroad," said Benedetta Lacey.