

To: Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada  
Hon. John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia  
Hon. David Eby, Attorney-General of British Columbia  
Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous Relations  
Hon. Scott Fraser, Minister of Indigenous Relations  
and Reconciliation  
Office of the Wet'suwet'en  
Unist'ot'en Camp  
S/Sgt. Janelle Shoihet, RCMP E Division

## **Health Professionals' Open Letter On Wet'suwet'en**

We are alarmed and concerned by events unfolding in northern British Columbia. Once again we have watched as RCMP officers armed with automatic weapons and equipped with dogs, drones, helicopters, and sound cannon and with the overwatch of RCMP snipers dismantled three peaceful Wet'suwet'en checkpoints.

These blockades arose from the incursion of a fracking natural gas pipeline backed by Dutch, Chinese, Korean, Malaysian and Japanese multinationals into traditional Wet'suwet'en territories, without permission from the Wet'suwet'en leadership and over their strenuous objection.

The health risks from fracking are well known, including release of carcinogenic toxins such as benzene. Pregnant women in northeastern BC have serum benzene levels three times the normal level (1) and studies have shown this has an association with increased childhood leukemia rates (2). U.S. studies have shown increases in congenital heart disease, chronic pulmonary disorders and small birthweight babies in populations living in proximity to fracking operations. And as we all know, every pipeline leaks.

In addition, the CGL pipeline would feed the massive LNG project in Kitimat. The whole project is geared to shipping huge volumes of LNG to Asian markets and increasing fossil fuel emissions worldwide at a time when the looming devastation of climate change is literally setting countries on fire. Australia is burning, Antarctic temperatures just passed 20 degrees Celsius. The health risks presented by climate change should terrify everyone.

The American Journal of Public Health has pointed out that indigenous groups are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change – “warming temperatures have the potential to affect infectious diseases associated with the preparation of traditional foods (e.g. gastroenteritis, food-borne botulism), zoonotic diseases (e.g. giardiasis) and traditional plants or remedies.” In addition, “high-intensity rainfall events could be particularly problematic, with waterborne disease outbreaks (e.g. typhoid, bacillary dysentery, Escherichia coli and

cryptosporidiosis)", not to mention the direct and indirect effects of wildfire outbreaks we have already seen in BC. (3)

Article 26.2, of the UN Declaration On The Rights Of Indigenous People states that "Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired." This right has been enshrined in law by B.C.'s Bill 41, as has the right of indigenous peoples not to be removed from their lands. But if the words of the provincial government uphold these rights, their actions do the complete opposite.

Despite the fact that the Wet'suwet'en have an established legal and moral right to govern their own territories, this inconvenient fact is being ignored by the provincial government the RCMP and even the courts. Once again unceded indigenous lands are being annexed by force and at the point of a gun. And this in turn has led to the polarization and division that has erupted across Canada.

**For these reasons, we, the undersigned health care professionals, join our voices with Amnesty International to call for a halt to further work on the CGL pipeline until the free prior informed consent of the Wet'suwet'en people has been obtained and support the call of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination for the RCMP to withdraw.**

**We also call on Premier John Horgan to place a moratorium on CGL construction permits and to return to the table with the Wet'suwet'en people.**

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- 1) <https://nouvelles.umontreal.ca/en/article/2017/11/13/exposure-to-benzene-during-pregnancy-a-pilot-study-raises-concerns-in-british-columbia/> has been linked to increased rates of pediatric leukemia
- 2) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6100118/>
- 3) James Ford, Indigenous Health and Climate Change, Am J Public Health, July 2012  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3477984/>