

FEBRUARY 7, 2020

MEMBERS of the University of Victoria community STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY IN SUPPORT OF WET’SUWET’EN JURISDICTION AND GOVERNANCE

WE ARE WRITING TO EXPRESS DEEP RESPECT AND OFFER OUR SOLIDARITY to the Wet'suwet'en people who, in accordance with their laws, while living in their territories, are carrying out their responsibilities to protect the natural world (i.e. lands, waters, plants, animals) and future generations from the encroachment of Coastal GasLink (CGL) in its effort to build a pipeline. The Wet’suwet’en show strength, courage, commitment, and vision in these acts, particularly in the face of the BC Supreme Court’s recent extension of an injunction against these acts (2019) so that industrial development vis-à-vis Coastal GasLink, may proceed. We stand with them in their assertion of their autonomy as a nation, legal authority in protecting their interests, and sovereignty of their unceded territories.

WE ALSO WRITE TO DENOUNCE THE ACTIONS OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, THE PROVINCIAL BC GOVERNMENT, THE RCMP, AND INDUSTRY. The historically violent incursions from the RCMP and industry into Wet’suwet’en lives and lands are unacceptable. This includes the raid at the peaceful Gidimt’en checkpoint on January 7, 2019, when 14 members of the Gidimt’en clan were arrested, and when the RCMP set up an “exclusion zone” on 13 January 2020, which has blocked media, Wet’suwet’en, and food from getting to the people. Further, these actions are in contradiction with the spirit of and recommendations made in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report (2015), the Missing Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry report (2019) and BC’s recent legislation to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2019). We expect Canadian officials to prevent any future militarization against the Unist’ot’en camp. We note that the Wet’suwet’en people and their supporters remain peaceful on the front lines.

WE RECOGNIZE THE DIRECTIVES WET’SUWET’EN HEREDITARY CHIEFS HAVE ISSUED AND ADVOCATE THEY BE RECOGNIZED BY THE RCMP AND CANADIAN OFFICIALS. The Wet’suwet’en Hereditary Chiefs, representing all five clans of the Wet’suwet’en Nation, have met with RCMP Deputy Commissioner and Commanding Officer Jennifer Strachan to reaffirm their opposition to the CGL Pipeline. We support the Hereditary Chiefs in their directives:

- That police stand down and refrain from enforcing the injunction order until nation-to-nation talks can occur with the provincial and federal governments to address infringements to Wet’suwet’en rights and title.
- That the remote detachment established by the RCMP on Wet’suwet’en territory be immediately removed.

- That no force or lethal weapons be used against Wet'suwet'en people and our supporters.
- That RCMP refrain from preventing Wet'suwet'en people and our guests from accessing our territories. Currently, the RCMP has advised local helicopter companies not to fly into Unist'ot'en territory, endangering the safety of Wet'suwet'en people and guests at the Gidimt'en Access Point and Unist'ot'en Village.
- That Wet'suwet'en people must not be forcibly removed or evicted from our own unceded territories.

On January 13, 2020 the Hereditary Chiefs also submitted a formal request to the United Nations to monitor RCMP, government and Coastal GasLink (CGL) actions on their traditional, unceded territory. This request follows the recent directive from the UN Committee on Racial Discrimination (CERD) requiring Canada to halt the CGL pipeline project and withdraw RCMP from Wet'suwet'en territory in order to avoid further violations of Wet'suwet'en, constitutional, and international law. We support this request to the UN Office of the Commissioner of Human Rights.

WE ENCOURAGE ALL PARTIES INVOLVED TO FAMILIARIZE THEMSELVES WITH THE FINAL INQUIRY REPORT ON MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS (2019) AND THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT ON GENDER, INDIGENOUS RIGHTS, AND ENERGY IN B.C. (2016). We recognize the significant leadership and ongoing presence of Wet'suwet'en women at the forefront of exchanges with RCMP and Coastal GasLink workers. We strongly advocate RCMP and Coastal GasLink ground themselves in education about violence and anti-violence against Indigenous women and keep this education at the forefront of their responsibilities in this matter. In addition, we express our profound concern about the direct correlation between increased violence against Indigenous women and girls, and remote industry camps that produce an influx of temporary workers of mostly young men. Concerns about the environment, Indigenous sovereignty, and violence against girls and women are interlinked, and need to be taken seriously by everyone. This is urgent given the lack of recognition of Indigenous peoples right to self-govern, the alarming rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and in-custody deaths of Indigenous men and boys, and the climate crisis. We stand in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en against colonialism, gender violence, and resource extraction that damages the earth.

WE EXPECT ACCURATE AND FAIR PUBLIC COMMUNICATION ON WET'SUWET'EN STRUGGLE AND SOLIDARITY. We urge Canadian governments and industry to stop their campaign of misinformation, especially claims or portrayals that all communities have signed on to the pipeline. This sidesteps the central question of jurisdiction and sovereignty over territories. Further, we urge Canadian media to refrain from invoking inflammatory tropes of protest which misrepresent the spirit of Wet'suwet'en action and that of their allies and diminishes the significance of this matter. In this vein, we encourage Canadian media to reacquaint themselves with historical conflicts between

Canada and various Indigenous nations such as Kanien'kehaka (Oka), Ojibway (Ipperwash), Secwepemc (Gustafsen Lake), and Mi'kmaw (Burnt Church), to ensure best practices in reporting on this matter.

WE CALL UPON ALL CANADIANS AND INTERNATIONAL WITNESSES TO ACTIVELY SUPPORT THE WET'SUWET'EN PEOPLES in their sovereignty and their struggle to protect their lands, waters, and ways of life. This is an opportunity to follow Anuc niwh'it'en (Wet'suwet'en law). In doing so, recognition of and respect for Wet'suwet'sn authority over their territories, according to their own ways will be demonstrated. Further, as has been stated by Wet'suwet'en citizens, the trajectory of Wet'suwet'en law in this matter secures a future for our descendants that includes a healthy natural world. We urge all communities to take up this call to action, whether through statements of solidarity, donations, fundraising, sending items to the camp, or going to the camp itself. Members of the Unist'ot'en have laid out protocols for support (see www.unistoten.camp). Additional ways to support include providing education or hosting teach-ins, engaging in critical conversations with others, challenging misinformation, and calling upon your elected officials to let Canada know that it needs to stand against conflict and for peace at home just as it does in matters abroad.

FINALLY, WE ARE AWARE THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENT POSITIONS THAT EXIST AMONGST WET'SUWET'EN PEOPLES WITHIN THEIR NATION. Much like any nation, community, family, or group of people, there are differences in visions for the future and ideas about best methods in actualizing that future. We respect that the Wet'suwet'en people self-govern who speaks for them and who represents them, without interference from corporations and Canadian governments. Our Statement of Solidarity is not a position against those Wet'suwet'en who seek to actualize a secure present and future from within Canadian governance models, legal apparatus, and economic systems that have been imposed on all Indigenous peoples and nations. We understand that these impositions have led to the extremely difficult material, economic, and social realities that the majority of Indigenous nations and peoples must negotiate today. Global economies, settler colonialism, neo-liberalism, and militarism have created and continue to sustain the situation that the Wet'suwet'sen nation and peoples are presently navigating and negotiating. We acknowledge and recognize the increasingly complex and difficult situation that is emerging for and amongst Wet'suwet'en peoples. We will continue to strive to be sensitive to and understand these complexities. In doing so, we commit to upholding and prioritizing Indigenous peoples' sovereignty, laws, and commitments in creating futures animated by, and in relationship with, a healthy natural world which will benefit us all.

In solidarity,

Open Forum Against Racism (OFAR)

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NOTE: For those who wish to utilize this solidarity letter, in full or part, to circulate in your own communities, please do.