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BC and Canada Ignore Wet'suwet'en Title Holders To Push Pipeline Agenda

Wet'suwet'en Yin'tah (Smithers, BC) – The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs condemn ongoing attempts by the governments of British Columbia and Canada to force unwanted industrial projects onto Wet'suwet'en traditional territories (Yin'tah) by ignoring the jurisdiction and title of the Wet'suwet'en people as represented by the Hereditary Chiefs (Dinī ze' and Ts'akë ze').

Violating Anuk Nu'at'en (our laws), Canadian law, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, BC and Canada have permitted TransCanada to work on their Coastal Gaslink pipeline within our Aboriginal title territories without obtaining our consent or undertaking meaningful consultation.

“The territory – the Yin'tah, the land, the air, the water – that all belongs to the Wet'suwet'en people. We've never ceded nor surrendered nor signed a treaty to give away any of that authority to anybody,” stated Dinī ze' Na'Moks, head chief of the Tsayu Clan. “If there are decisions to be made on our land, it is our decision and nobody else's.”

The Wet'suwet'en people have never lost in court against BC or Canada. In the *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* decision, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Wet'suwet'en rights and title had never been extinguished across the 22,000km² of Wet'suwet'en Yin'tah. As was upheld in the *Tsilhqot'in* decision, Aboriginal title includes the right to exclusive use and occupation of land, and the right to decide its use.

“With the *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* court case, they recognized our oral history,” stated Dinī ze' Kloum Khun. “They recognized the hereditary chiefs, the hereditary system, our matriarchal system – it's something that we don't have to prove when we go to the courts.” Dinī ze' and Ts'akë ze' do not make decisions alone, but represent the will of their Clan members as determined by the larger group.

“We are truly democratic. It is our people that steer our decisions as hereditary chiefs. They speak the words and we push it forward,” stated Dinī ze' Na'Moks.

The *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* ruling recognized the Baht'lats (Feast Hall) as the forum of Wet'suwet'en governance. In feasts, the Gilseyhu, Laksamshu, Gitdumden and Tsayu clans have rejected all pipeline proposals. The province is aware that all affected Wet'suwet'en house groups reject TransCanada's Coastal Gaslink project as it infringes on Wet'suwet'en Title, Rights, and Interests.

“The federal government talks about reconciliation and they undermine their own words by trying to shove pipelines down our throat, or industry down our throat,” stated Dinī ze’ Madeek, head chief of the Gitdumden Clan. “As we stated in 2006, there will be no pipeline to enter Wet’suwet’en territory.”

Evading its legal duty to consult with Wet’suwet’en Dinī ze’ and Ts’akë ze’, government has passed this responsibility onto corporations like TransCanada. This consultation process exacerbates conflict in our Wet’suwet’en communities and creates public confusion.

“They’ve been attempting to circumvent the hereditary system and begun to deal exclusively with bands,” stated Dinī ze’ Smogelgem, head chief of the Laksamshu Clan. “If government continues to neglect to adhere to the Supreme Court decision, we will be meeting them back in court.”

“A tactic that they use is divide and conquer – the federal elected system versus the hereditary system are not seeing eye to eye because of what the provinces are doing. They are going to the elected people who have only jurisdiction on reserve land. Regarding the territories, the caretakers are the hereditary chiefs, the Clans,” stated Dinī ze’ Hagwilnegh, head chief of the Laksilyu Clan.

Wet’suwet’en people have already witnessed catastrophic impacts from unimpeded industrial access to our Yin’tah and neighbouring territories. From the damming of the Nechako River, which drowned our Caribou in 1952, to seepage of toxic tailings from Equity’s silver mine that decimated the salmon stocks of Goosley Lake in the 1980s, to the many clear cuts that scar our lands, it is clear that industry cannot be left to their own devices to operate on our Yin’tah.

“We have to stand up for our traditional territories. We have to make sure that we are the ones that make the decisions on them. If we say no to a project, if we say no to any kind of development because it would impede our ability to take care of our future generations, then that’s going to be the answer,” stated Dinī ze’ Smogelgem.

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