

November 30, 2020

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Provincial Health Officer  
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**Re: Urgent Concerns from Wet'suwet'en Ts'ako ze' and Skiy ze'**

We are writing to you with grave concern over the continuation of local Coastal GasLink (LNG) work and man camps in our territories, in the communities of Burns Lake (C'ilhts'ëkhyu Clan territory), Huckleberry Camp near Houston (on Gidimt'en Clan territory) and camp 9A (on Unist'ot'en territory).

As Ts'ako ze' (female chiefs) within our five clans (Gidimt'en, Likhsilyu, Likhts'amisyu, Tsayu, and C'ilhts'ëkhyu), we have the responsibility to protect each other, our skiy ze' (children and upcoming chiefs) and our yintah (territories). Our Nation is responsible for 22,000 square kms of territory between what is now known as Burns Lake and Witset. Our governance system is thousands of years old because we have acted upon our responsibilities since our people first emerged. Similar to other Indigenous Nations, our communities are already suffering the loss of our language speakers and cultural knowledge keepers. Due to colonization we now have less than 2.9 percent of language speakers left, who have an average age of 71. Our language and culture is as important to us as our yintah. The passing of each elder has intergenerational impacts on our ability to maintain our language and culture.

We understand that the province has declared oil and gas work an essential service, however, we strongly encourage you to reconsider. First, the economy cannot come before Indigenous lives; second, the protocols in place do not protect our most vulnerable communities; and lastly, our Houses and Clans have a right and responsibility to make decisions about what happens on our territories.

1. The province has a responsibility to Indigenous people. Many policies have been put in place to destroy our people, lands, language and culture. These policies have been very effective and we must protect what we have left. The unnecessary death of one language speaker or knowledge keeper would have devastating effects on our families, communities, and governance system. Making a conscious decision to bring transient workers into our territories and communities is telling us that the economic gain of the province or state is more important than our language and cultures. You are telling us that the economic gain of the province is more important than our lives. Your behaviour and attitude facilitates the states' genocide of our people and lands.

2. Living in these northern rural communities, we see and feel the influx of transient workers in our communities. Our hotels are occupied by LNG workers, we see the traffic through our territories increase ten fold, we see the workers eating in our restaurants, shopping at our

grocery stores and visiting our local pubs and bars on a regular basis. Not only have we witnessed an increase in drugs, alcohol and gang related violence in our communities, we are now faced with a disease that could kill any one of us. So, in addition to the risk man camps have on our Indigenous women and girls, we are now facing the loss of some of our most sacred elders and chiefs.

3. Finally, this pandemic has vastly changed the way society functions. Many of these changes have benefited families, communities and the land. Society had to adjust to new norms. Some have been difficult and others have been welcome. We see this as an opportunity to change the way Indigenous people are treated from less than human and unworthy of protection to the valuable community members that we are. We have always maintained our governance system, which is designed to protect our people and land, and most recently BC has adopted the UNDRIP into legislation. This body of laws set out a framework for our relations with one another. These relations must be based on our inherent rights, our decision making, and our free, prior, and informed consent. We do not consent to man camps and transient workers in our rural northern communities putting our women, elders and knowledge keepers at risk. We do not consent to putting the province's economic security above our lives. We call on you to listen to our ancient and inherent governance system when our clans and Chiefs make decisions and to declare that oil and gas work in our territories be postponed until the Wet'suwet'en decide it's safe--based on unbiased, scientific evidence and Wet'suwet'en decision making processes.

We, as the Indigenous peoples of this land, are essential to the land and the history of this country. Our languages, land and culture are essential to who we are as a nation--a people. Without it, Canada and BC have completed their genocide of our people, and as Tsakë ze' and Skiy ze' we cannot allow it.

Awetza,

Gidimt'en Ts'ako ze' and Skiy ze'

Timberwolf, Mabel Forsythe  
Dunen, Lucy Ganon  
Sleydo', Molly Wickham  
Jennifer Wickham, Skiy ze'  
Melanie Forsythe, Skiy ze'  
Delee Nikal, Skiy ze'

Likhts'amisyu Ts'ako ze' and Skiy ze'

Tsebesa, Lillian Wilson  
Wilowh, Lorraine Naziel

Likhsilyu Ts'ako ze' and Skiy ze'

Kiliset, Violet Gellenbeck  
We'es Tes, Sandra Martin Harris  
Charlotte Euverman, Skiy ze'  
Lillian Granley, Skiy ze'  
Jolene Andrew, Skiy ze'  
Leona Joseph, Skiy ze'

C'ilhts'ëkhyu Ts'ako ze'' and Skiy ze'

Lht'at'en, Doris Rosso  
Howilhkat, Freda Huson  
K'ëltiy, Brenda Mitchell  
Masgibu, Helen Mitchell  
Weli', Catherine Michell  
K'ots'git, Virginia Pierre  
Dr. Karla Tait, Skiy 'ze

Tsayu Ts'ako ze' and Skiy ze'

Wilat, Sue Alfred

CC:

Adrian Dix, Minister of Health  
Nathan Cullen, Minister of State for Lands and Natural Resources Operations  
Sandra George, Witset Band Chief Councillor  
Beverly Clifton, Witset Health Director  
Cynthia Joseph, LLB, Hagwilget Village Chief Councillor