

Media Release  
23 January 2019

## **Open letter urges federal and provincial governments to suspend construction of Site C dam: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Premier John Horgan can't ignore recommendations of United Nations anti-racism committee**

A new statement from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) has underlined the urgency of immediately suspending construction of the Site C dam.

“The UN’s top anti-racism body has recognized that continued construction of the Site C dam is a serious threat to fundamental human rights,” said Chief Roland Willson of the West Moberly First Nations. “This latest statement from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination makes it clear that the federal and provincial governments have no claim to being human rights champions so long as they continue to ignore the impacts of Site C on our Treaty rights.”

UNCERD first called for a halt to construction of the Site C dam in August 2017 during a regular review of Canada’s human rights record. The independent, expert committee has now underlined the urgency of its recommendation by issuing a new statement under an emergency procedure meant to prevent serious violations of human rights.

In an open letter released today, the West Moberly and Prophet River First Nations are supported by downstream First Nations, and by 16 Indigenous peoples’ organizations, human rights, environmental and social justice groups across BC and Canada, in calling on the federal and provincial governments to immediately comply with CERD’s recommendations.

“The fact that the UN’s top anti-racism body takes the potential impact of the Site C dam on Indigenous peoples so seriously should be a wake-up call to the federal and provincial governments and indeed to all Canadians,” said Galen Armstrong, Sierra Club BC’s Peace Valley Campaigner.

UNCERD is an independent, expert body appointed to oversee state compliance with the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a legally-binding human rights treaty ratified by Canada.

The Committee's latest statement on Site C follows the decision of a BC court to allow construction of the dam to continue even though a fundamental Treaty rights challenge is still before the courts.

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson said on behalf of the executive of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), "The federal and provincial governments have been getting away with ignoring Treaty rights in the short term. Eventually, however, they will have to deal with the fact, recognized by this expert body, that the Site C dam violates rights that are legally protected and which both levels of government are obligated to uphold. Any sensible government would stop throwing good money after bad on a project that it's clear can never be completed."

In addition to calling for a halt to construction of the Site C dam, the UN Committee also called on the federal and provincial governments to seek independent expert advice on implementation of their legal human rights obligations, including the responsibility to respect and uphold the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples.

Craig Benjamin, Indigenous rights campaigner for Amnesty International Canada, said, "These human rights experts have clearly recognized that there is an unacceptable gap between the promises made by the Trudeau and Horgan governments and the appalling reality of their actions trampling the rights of First Nations who depend on the Peace River. The UN Committee is giving the federal and provincial governments an opportunity to correct course on their disastrous support for the Site C dam. They should seize this opportunity."

- 30 -

Media contacts:

**Chief Roland Willson**

West Moberly First Nations  
(250) 783-0733

**Kukpi7 Judy Wilson**

Secretary Treasurer  
Union of BC Indian Chiefs  
(250) 320-7738

**Galen Armstrong**

Peace Valley Campaigner, Sierra Club BC  
(778) 679-3191  
galen@sierraclub.bc.ca

**Craig Benjamin**

Campaigner for the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples  
Amnesty International Canada  
(613) 744-7667 (ext 235)  
cbenjamin@amnesty.ca