

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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News Release

July 29, 2019

UBCIC Calls on the Government of BC to uphold Tsilhqot'in Rights and protect Težtan Biny and Yanah Biny

(Coast Salish Territory / Vancouver, B.C. – July 29, 2019) For over two decades the Tsilhqot'in have battled to keep Taseko Mines Ltd. (TML) from destroying Težtan Biny and Yanah Biny with TML's plan to create an open pit mine on a place of profound cultural and spiritual significance. Both TML and TNG have filed injunctions in B.C. Supreme Court and are in court today and tomorrow.

In 2008 TML worked to advance the Prosperity Mine project and planned to create a tailings pond in Težtan Biny. The federal government rejected proposals by TML seeking permits for an open pit gold-copper mine in the area. In 2016, TML sued the B.C. and Canadian governments, seeking damages for failing to grant the required permits. TML now holds a provincial permit for drilling that was issued in July 2017, the day before the B.C. Liberals left office. When contractors for TML attempted to bring heavy equipment in July 2, 2019 they were stopped by a peaceful protest.

Today, TML is seeking an injunction that would restrict Tsilhqot'in Nation residents and other opponents from blocking the company's access to the site of its New Prosperity project. The TNG are also seeking an injunction against TML to prohibit the drilling program until there can be a full trial to establish that it constitutes an unjustified infringement of proven Aboriginal rights.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated "This aggressive and continued injustice is absolutely unacceptable; the territory in which Težtan Biny lies is a pristine and sacred area of great importance to the Tsilhqot'in who rely on this area for hunting, fishing, and trapping. The UBCIC will continue to stand in solidarity with the Tsilhqot'in Nation in their stance against TML. We urgently call on the Provincial government and Premier John Horgan to act immediately to save Težtan Biny and uphold their commitment to recognize and honor Indigenous Title and Rights."

Chief Don Tom, Vice-President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated “Article 29 in the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* articulates that Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of their environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources; it is imperative that the *UN Declaration* be upheld in a time of “reconciliation.” Allowing TML to do any exploratory drilling or construction of the mine is in direct violation of Tsilhqot’in Law; TML does not have the Tsilhqot’in Nation’s consent to undertake this work.”

“The Tsilhqot’in Nation has a special relationship to and authority over its lands and waters through the exercise of its inherent Title and Rights. Since time immemorial, the Tsilhqot’in have exercised their own laws and legal orders and taken care of their territories. If anyone is to be removed from Teztan Biny, it should absolutely be TML, and not the Tsilhqot’in, who are exercising their jurisdiction and sacred responsibilities to protect the land and waters,” concluded Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

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UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

For more information and news from the Tsilhqot’in: <http://www.tsilhqotin.ca/>

For more information from the UBCIC please visit www.ubcic.bc.ca