

Indigenous Youth Arrested in Solidarity with Wet'suwet'en File Complaint about Police Conduct

(Lekwungen and WSÁNEĆ territories, B.C. – January 29, 2020) Indigenous youth arrested last week held a press conference this morning condemning the police and RCMP's violent conduct toward Indigenous peoples and reiterating their full support for the Wet'suwet'en land defenders.

On January 21st, Indigenous Youth of Nuuchahnulth, Wet'suwet'en, Tla'amin, Sto:lo, Secwepemcúlecw, Namgis, Heiltsuk, Kwagu'ł, Ma'amtagila, Lil'wat, Qayqayt, Lue Chogh Tue, Shishalh, WSÁNEĆ, Gitxsan, and Sk̓w̓xwú7mesh Nations occupied the Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en. The purpose of this occupation was to amplify the demands of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary leadership for the RCMP to stand down and remove their blockade on the Wet'suwet'en yintahs and for Premier Horgan to meet directly with hereditary leaders. Instead, a contingent of thirty to forty officers from the Victoria and Saanich Police forcibly removed each youth and a Ma'amtagila elder between the hours of 2:00-6:00 AM.

Victoria Police Department states that there were no injuries. One youth was heard yelling "you are hurting my arm" "this really hurts my arm" as officers were pulling their arm out of a device. There are also reports of multiple protesters outside sustaining injuries, including one so severe surgery may be needed. Less recorded but viscerally felt, is the impact of such conduct on Indigenous people who are upholding their own Indigenous law and protecting inherent title and rights.

For these reasons, youth who were arrested have formally triggered a complaint with the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner. Emails have also been made to the mayor, city councillors, the BCCLA, the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, Carol James (MLA Victoria-Beacon Hill), David Eby (Attorney General), Mike Farnworth (Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General) and Mark Sieben (Deputy Solicitor General).

Ta'Kaiya Blaney, Tla'amin, is an activist and well-known singer who was arrested last week. She stated, "It is the understanding of Indigenous Youth for Wet'suwet'en Solidarity that opposition to Coastal GasLink is critical for the wellbeing of their future and the future of their traditional territories. Canada's willingness to bulldoze unceded Wet'suwet'en lands is a harrowing demonstration of the measures Canada is prepared to take upon all Indigenous lands and communities. Indigenous Youth for Wet'suwet'en Solidarity demands remain the same. Canada and B.C. must meet the bare minimum by dignifying the decisions of Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Leadership, respecting their ancestral law, and removing RCMP and CGL from Wet'suwet'en territories. The over-representation of Indigenous individuals in the Canadian carceral system is, amongst other conditions, a tangible symptom of colonial policing and the racialized targeting of Indigenous individuals and groups through escalatory, excessively physical, and punitive law enforcement."

"The response of the police toward peaceful Indigenous youth is concerning given recent reports on the over-representation of Indigenous individuals within the Canadian Justice system," stated Chief Don Tom, Tsartlip First Nation and Vice-President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. "As Correctional Investigator of Canada Dr. Ivan Zinger describes in [a recent statement](#), custody rates

for Indigenous individuals have accelerated and Indigenous women in particular account for 42% of women inmates in Canada. As Dr. Zinger states, 'The Indigenization of Canada's prison population is nothing short of a national travesty. We are completely disappointed that rather than come and meet with the Indigenous youth standing in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en, the Province decided to arrest them. We continue to call for peace and non-violence.'

Indigenous Youth for Wet'suwet'en Solidarity commit to continue to blockade MLA and MP offices nationally until Wet'suwet'en laws are upheld.

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