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Indigenous Youth Condemn VPD Brutality and Charges Laid for Peaceful Sit-In; Call on Canada to End Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion

February 22, 2021, (X^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk^wxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətəl (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C – On Friday February 19, Indigenous youth with the group Braided Warriors were violently removed and arrested by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) after a peaceful sit-in in downtown Vancouver. For the past week, Braided Warriors has been peacefully occupying insurance companies to call on these companies to stop backing the Trans Mountain Expansion pipeline project.

On February 19, Braided Warriors occupied and engaged in ceremony in the BMO building which houses AIG Insurance. They were violently removed by approximately 25 VPD officers, who began violently assaulting and arresting the Indigenous youth. Four young people were arrested and, upon release, two youth had to receive medical treatment in the hospital.

Video footage of VPD violence and the injuries sustained can be found on @BraidedWarriors on Twitter and Instagram.

Braided Warriors is issuing the following media statement:

“We went to AIG offices in the BMO building of Downtown Vancouver to demand AIG stop insuring TMX and stop insuring genocide against Indigenous peoples. As Indigenous youth, we are taking a stand with all our Indigenous relatives in our collective fight for Land Back and an end to resource extraction on our lands and waters.

Approximately 70 VPD officers, many of whom were not wearing masks, all came in at once. We were given no warning or any time prior to being violently assaulted and removed from the property. The phone that we were livestreaming from was confiscated. We were violently thrown to the ground, dragged across floors and down stairways, pulled by the hair and braid, thrown to a surface covered in glass, strangled in a chokehold, or dragged face down on concrete. Our ceremonial items including drums, abalone shells, feathers, and red dresses to remember MMIW were desecrated, thrown, stepped on, and broken. Some of the VPD badge numbers that we collected were: 3314, 3241, 2993, 3330, and 3221.

Four of us were held in custody for over six hours and were initially denied access to lawyers. When we mentioned our bruises and injuries, we were told “She’s not going to the hospital, she’s going to jail,” and “You are lucky you are not in the States.” One of the youth arrested was refused urgent medical attention while in custody despite her head bleeding open, and had to receive emergency medical attention upon being released. One other youth who was not arrested also had to seek urgent medical care the same night, as well as another youth the following day. One person’s hand has severe soft tissue damage and requires a splint and physiotherapy. The person who was refused medical attention in-custody after having her head beaten open had to have her forehead glued and was diagnosed with a concussion.

After all this, we are the ones facing a number of criminal charges under this colonial law that has constantly tried to break and criminalize Indigenous resistance. But we will not be intimidated or silenced. We call on all people to make complaints to the Vancouver Police Department, the Vancouver Police Board, the Office of the Police Complaints Commissioner, and AIG Insurance to demand accountability for violence against Indigenous youth. Drop the charges! Stop insuring genocide! Canada must end the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion!”

From February 22-26, 2021 Kanahus Manuel and Mayuk Manuel, members of the Nekonlith Indian Band, are facing a political show trial for unjust charges stemming from their opposition to Trans Mountain Expansion near Blue River in Secwepemc territories. According to **Kanahus Manuel of the Tiny House Warriors**, “When Indigenous land defenders protect our waters and lands and insist on our right to affirm our laws and jurisdiction, we are arrested and jailed. We stand in full support of the Braided Warriors against Justin Trudeau’s Trans Mountain Pipeline and its private corporate backers like AIG Insurance. Neither the federal nor the provincial government has secured our consent for the Trans Mountain Expansion pipeline as required under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Canada has signed. We will never allow the Trans Mountain Expansion to be built on Secwepemc land.”

In January 2021, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination [wrote](#) to Canada regarding the violations of the rights of Indigenous peoples, in particular the absence of the free, prior and informed consent of the Secwepemc and Wet’suwet’en communities in relation to the approval of the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion project and the Coastal Gas Link Pipeline, as well as the development of Site C dam project.

“We are appalled at the VPD’s treatment of peaceful Indigenous youth protesting the Trans Mountain Pipeline,” says **Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, Secretary-Treasurer of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs**. “While the government claims to be taking action to end systemic racism and to seek reconciliation, Indigenous youth are being thrown on the ground, their hair is pulled, and they have to go to the hospital for police-inflicted injuries. Indigenous youth must not be criminalized and targeted for peacefully standing with Indigenous nations asserting their Title and Rights; this is in clear opposition to BC’s obligations under the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. We are inspired by the action of Indigenous youth and we raise our hands to them for their actions for all our future generations.”

States **Harsha Walia, Executive Director of BC Civil Liberties Association**, “The VPD’s horrifying treatment of Indigenous youth should outrage us all. The use of unbridled policing power is an attempt to silence and criminalize Indigenous people. With global movements decrying systemic racism in policing, this is a clear example of racist policing. The brutality meted out on Indigenous youth must be reviewed, the officers must be held accountable, and all charges must be dropped. We urgently need to transform the colonial disaster of policing.”

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