



Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs Set the Record Straight in Response to Province of BC's Divide and Conquer Sharp Dealings

MEDIA RELEASE: Wet'suwet'en *Yintah*, *Laksilyu* Clan, *Kwen Baiyex*: Houston, BC
June 15, 2016 – In a powerful expression of Wet'suwet'en culture and *anuk nu'at'en* (our laws), *dini ze'* & *ts'akë ze'* (male & female hereditary chiefs) entered a community hall on Monday in Houston, BC amidst thunderous drumming and the sacred *Lahksilyu* (Small Frog) Clan *Cis Cun* (feathers return) song, summoning the spirits of the *Cideni* (ancestors) to help guide important Wet'suwet'en business. Led into the feast hall pursuant to traditional protocol by *ts'akë ze' Kaliset* (Vi Gellenback), the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs were compelled to address a gathering of liquefied natural gasline (LNG) pipeline proponents, Province of BC officials, and Wet'suwet'en Clan and House Group members. The Provincial Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (MARR) had secretly planned with and provided resources to a new BC Societies Act organization called the Wet'suwet'en Matriarchal Society, evidencing yet another in a long series of dishonorable sharp dealings by the Crown to undermine the proper rights holder authority of the hereditary chiefs and create division and strife within the Wet'suwet'en Nation.

Dini ze' Hagwilnegh (Ron Mitchell), a head chief of the *Lahksilyu* (Small Frog) Clan spoke first, expressing that this concerning matter had come to the attention of the hereditary chiefs who met to discuss how they would deal with it. *Dini ze' Hagwilnegh* announced in Wet'suwet'en language, "we have come to you today in the spirit of 'whaggus' (respect) adhering to our traditional laws and processes to address this issue. I had the honor of being translator for our people in the *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* case; I heard the words of our chiefs and we must not ever go against their words when they gave evidence that reiterated our laws, shared our sacred caretaker roles of our land, and educated the court of our feast hall protocols, and hereditary chief successions. I am here today to announce that we are holding a *Bahlats* on June 30, 2016, as that is where we deal with and make decisions regarding our *yintah*. On behalf of the *Lahksilyu* Clan and my fellow chiefs, we invite you all to attend."

"It is with heavy hearts that we are here today to make a statement regarding this Matriarchal Society that was created contrary to our Wet'suwet'en laws, by individuals who have no authority and are acting out of self-interest with no involvement of our

members; that is not how we do our business,” expressed *Dinī ze’ Kloum Khun* (Alphonse Gagnon), a head chief of the *Laksamshu* (Fireweed & Owl) Clan. “BC and LNG proponents are attempting to try to tear a piece of our system apart so that they can try to say that our system is validating their LNG plans. We recognize that they are throwing all sorts of money at our people in an effort to persuade them to support their pipelines; we as Chiefs cannot fault our people for accepting these short-term opportunities. We the *dinī ze’ & ts’akē ze’* have come today to provide an unequivocal statement that was reached by consensus of all five Clans that we do not sanction or authorize this Matriarchal Society to speak or act in any way, shape or form on behalf of the Wet’suwet’en Nation.”

Richard Sam, the son of *ts’akē ze’ Kelah* (Mabel Critch), and grandson of the late *dinī ze’ Woos* (Topley Mathew Sam) was in attendance in support of the hereditary chiefs and recounted his experience last fall when he was touring the *yintah* and encountered a Wet’suwet’en member working on a feller-buncher, clearing a right-of-way for a proposed pipeline, “At that time I said to the worker, ‘you have a right to make money, take the money from these companies as this pipeline will never move ahead, so take their money while you can, but just remember who you are, and at the end of the day you need to support your chiefs and come back to the fold.’”

“It is extremely unfortunate that just as we [hereditary chiefs] were putting on our regalia, preparing for our traditional entrance, the BC and the LNG officials exited the hall and sped off in their vehicles without even saying one word to us chiefs,” stated *Dinī ze’ Na’moks* (John Ridsdale), a head chief of the *Tsayu* (Beaver) Clan. “It is deeply disturbing that MARR has come to our chiefs’ table to discuss the development of a government-to-government agreement, yet they go behind our backs and provide resources to unauthorized organizations such as this in what can only be seen as an effort to compromise our authority. I brought my Talking Stick so that we could conduct traditional *T’uz* invitations to all in attendance, including BC and LNG officials, to our *Bahlats* on June 30, 2016. By copy of this Media Release and in follow-up letters we will send, we officially extend the invitation to the BC and LNG proponent officials that were in attendance to participate in our feast where we will discuss our *yintah* related issues properly, in accordance with our laws, protocols and governance system.”

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