

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs put BC and Canada on Notice Regarding Proper Rights and Title Holder Jurisdiction over Wet'suwet'en Lands

WET'SUWET'EN TERRITORY: Smithers, BC - The Wet'suwet'en *Dinï ze'* and *Ts'ake'ze'* (male and female hereditary chiefs) have written to British Columbia (BC) and Canada in response to natural gas pipeline agreements that BC has entered into with *Indian Act* Band Councils within the Wet'suwet'en *Yintah* (traditional territory) to put them on notice regarding our proper rights and title holder jurisdiction over Wet'suwet'en lands.

Dinï ze' and Ts'ake'ze are the proper rights and title holder

Since time immemorial the Wet'suwet'en *Dinï ze'* and *Ts'ake'ze* have governed, managed and utilized the resources from our *yintah* -- territory that we have occupied since time immemorial under our matrilineal clan and house governance system. Wet'suwet'en occupancy and utilization of our *yintah* is governed by our *Inuk Nu'at'en* (our laws) to ensure the sustainable use of resources, in accordance with our principle of *Waquus* (respect), for current and future generations.

In 1984, the Wet'suwet'en *Dinï ze'* and *Ts'ake'ze* began a court action on behalf of all Wet'suwet'en people claiming our self-government and title ownership over our Wet'suwet'en *yintah*, in what has become known as the historic *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* case. On December 11, 1997 the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruled that Wet'suwet'en rights and title have never been extinguished, and that Aboriginal title includes the right to exclusively use and occupy our land. Building on the shoulders of *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa*, the SCC rendered a landmark judgment in the *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia* declaring Tsilhqot'in title to approximately 1,900 km² of their traditional territory. This decision cemented the fact that Aboriginal title includes the right to determine the uses to which title lands can be put, as well as the need for the Crown and proponents to seek our consent for major resource developments on our lands.

In the Tsilhqot'in case, the court made it clear that it is the, historic community of people sharing language, customs, traditions, historical experience, territory and resources at the time of first contact and at sovereignty assertion that are the proper

rights and title holder. Indian Act bands did not exist in our territory at these times. This decision unequivocally affirms that the Wet'suwet'en *Dinï ze'* and *Ts'ake'ze* are the proper rights and title holder, on behalf of all Wet'suwet'en people, with respect to the Wet'suwet'en *Yintah*.

BC is engaging in sharp dealings including divide & conquer tactics within the Wet'suwet'en Nation

It was a shock to the *Dinï ze'* and *Ts'ake'ze*, upon reviewing BC's natural gas pipeline agreements, that the agreements are replete with numerous terms and conditions related to Wet'suwet'en rights and title, consultation and accommodation, and the s. 35 rights of the *Canadian Constitution*. Even more disturbing is that in face-to-face meetings and community forums, BC Minister's and officials, misrepresented these agreements as exclusively economic agreements, with nothing to do with Wet'suwet'en rights and title interests whatsoever. This is bad faith on the part of BC, and the epitome of "sharp dealings," that clearly brings the honor and integrity of the Crown into disrepute.

BC and Canada have a moral and legal obligation to consult, engage and obtain free, prior and informed consent from our traditional governance leadership and that our governance structure be acknowledged and respected. The "divide and conquer" tactics of BC must cease between Indian Band leadership and the Hereditary Chiefs. We once again express that we, the Hereditary Chiefs be consulted as the proper rights and title holder.

The *Dinï ze'* and *Ts'ake'ze* have <u>not consented</u> to LNG development on our Wet'suwet'en lands.

We wish to honor the *Dinï ze'* and *Ts'ake'ze* and *C'ide'ni* (ancestors) who looked after our land, animals and natural resources in a holistic healthy manner enabling distinct Wet'suwet'en peoples to exist since time immemorial. We would also like to thank our supporters and allies for their ongoing solidarity and encourage everyone with an interest in pipeline related activities to learn more about our lands, history, and culture at www.wetsuweten.com

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