



CLIMATE ACTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA RECOGNIZES THE RIGHTS OF THE WET'SUWET'EN HEREDITARY CHIEFS TO GOVERN THEIR TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR OWN LAWS

We acknowledge and urge the strong recognition of the rights of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs to govern their traditional territories in accordance with their own laws. Following the [Delgamuukw decision](#), Canada's own courts recognize the legitimacy and authority of Indigenous legal orders, including the rights of hereditary chiefs to govern their traditional territories. In accordance with these rights and responsibilities the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs are peacefully defending their traditional territories, which remain unceded, from ecological and interpersonal violence. We hold that all discussions of this topic must proceed from this understanding.

We respectfully acknowledge that some First Nations governments and communities support the Coastal Gaslink project. Our statement is not intended to undermine their views or authority. Rather, we echo the BC Human Rights Commissioner in stating that: "Human rights are not a numbers game. Human rights do not exist only for the majority. They exist for each individual, and in the case of free, prior, and informed consent for each Indigenous rights holding group...this is precisely when our commitment to human rights principles is truly needed." Until consensus among the Wet'suwet'en has been reached, under conditions of free, prior, and informed consent, no action should be imposed upon their communities.

Secondly, we denounce the militarized state response to the Wet'suwet'en blockade, including the RCMP's authorization of lethal overwatch in its operations on Wet'suwet'en land as well as the violent arrest of unarmed land protectors and the dismantling of parts of the Wet'suwet'en camp. We hold that this is an unacceptable abuse of the land protectors' human rights and a significant overstepping of the government's legal authority.

Thirdly, these actions represent an obvious failure of the federal and provincial governments to meaningfully implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). UNDRIP provisions state that governments require the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of Indigenous Nations when development is proposed in their territories. The Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs' refusal of the Coastal Gas Link pipeline's path through ecologically and culturally significant portions of their territory, and the pipeline owners' rejection of the hereditary chiefs' [proposed alternative route](#) for the pipeline, mean that the conditions of FPIC have not been met.

Consultation is not consent. A [recent statement](#) issued by the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD), of which Canada is a signatory, called upon the Canadian government to reverse the authorization of lethal force and forceful removal of Wet'suwet'en peoples and to "immediately halt the construction and suspend all permits and approvals for the construction of the Coastal Gas Link pipeline in the traditional and unceded lands and territories of the Wet'suwet'en peoples, until they grant their free, prior and informed consent." We join UNCERD in this call.

Fourthly, we note the imbrication of Albertan interests within the Coastal Gas Link pipeline dispute—entanglements that give us a unique responsibility as an Albertan research community to speak on this issue. The Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMCo) manages investments for the pension funds of many public sector workers in this province, including those of the University of Alberta's Non-Academic Staff Association (NASA) and the Association of Academic Staff at the University of Alberta (AASUA). The UCP government has recently rolled back joint governance agreements over some public-sector pension funds, weakening worker control over the deferred wages of their pensions. AIMCo, moreover, has [purchased a large share](#) in the Coastal Gas Link pipeline, and recently [redoubled its commitment](#) to this move despite international outcry over the violent arrest of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and land protectors. We denounce this undemocratic and financially questionable decision, stating firmly: not in our name and not with our wages.

Finally, we anchor our opposition to the mistreatment of the Wet'suwet'en blockade in the values and commitments that inform our own university's [Strategic Plan For the Public Good](#). This document states that "we take seriously our responsibility to steward and sustain public investments in our people, operations, infrastructure, and systems" and that "we strive to model sustainability as an integral part of university life, recognizing that the health and well-being of our people are tied to the health and well-being of our environment, economy, and social systems." Pursuant to these goals, as well as our institution's founding mandate of "uplifting the whole people," we reject a politics that benefits some Albertans at the expense of others, and that comes at the cost of the violent and ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands and rights.

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