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In September, 2017, the **UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)** noted that Indigenous peoples had suffered 'devastating and disproportionate' impacts from the 2014 copper mine disaster and called on Canada to provide remedy and reparations to those harmed. It gave Canada one year to report on health impact studies.

As Minister responsible for overseeing the coordination of Canada's reporting to, as well as engagement and follow up with international human rights bodies such as the UN CERD, the **Minister of Canadian Heritage,**

**Mélanie Joly** and her officials are expected to play a lead role in ensuring that Canada reports back to the Committee in August. They must provide a substantive response to the urgent concerns and recommendations that CERD raised with respect to the human rights abuses associated with the Mount Polley Mine disaster.



## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

On August 4, 2014, Canadians awoke to the news that a major British Columbia copper mine tailings pond had failed, sending 25 million cubic metres of toxic mine tailings and water rushing into pristine Quesnel Lake. Residents living near the mine were devastated to see parts of the crystal clear lake filled with thick, grey mining sludge. Those toxic tailings cannot be safely removed from the lake.

For Indigenous peoples who rely on the annual wild salmon return, the timing could not have been worse: the Department of Fisheries and Oceans shut down several key fisheries in the wake of the disaster and scores of Secwepemc, St'at'imc and Tsilhqot'in communities were warned to not fish that year.

The financial, emotional, spiritual, and health costs of the loss of salmon – a vital source of food and cultural practice for Indigenous peoples – are enormous.

Jacinda Mack, member of the nearby Xatsull First Nation, made clear the impact of the disaster: “Our people are grieving. My grandchildren will never know what its like to swim and fish in Quesnel Lake. That’s the inheritance, part of our bloodline now”.

To date, the mine’s owner, Imperial Metals, has not been fined, charged or sanctioned for the disaster. In fact, the BC Crown failed to carry forward two private prosecutions filed by concerned citizens.

**So far, Canada and British Columbia have failed to act.**

A criminal investigation under the auspices of the BC Conservation Officer Service and the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans is underway. It is not expected to conclude before August 4, 2019. Until then, residents fear eating fish and drinking water that could be contaminated by mine waste.

**For more information visit: [www.amnesty.ca/mountpolley](http://www.amnesty.ca/mountpolley)**