



DEFENDING WATER, DEFENDING RIGHTS

“THE LAST PIECE OF OUR BACKYARD”

DESTRUCTION OF THE PEACE RIVER VALLEY TO BUILD THE SITE C DAM VIOLATES TREATY RIGHTS

A joint federal-provincial environmental impact assessment concluded that construction of the Site C dam would cause “severe”, “permanent” and “irreversible” harm to the First Nations who rely on the Peace River Valley. The federal government and the province of British Columbia approved the project anyway.

The \$10.3 billion Site C dam, now under construction in northeast British Columbia, is one of the largest resource development projects underway anywhere in Canada.

“WE’VE NEVER SAID NO TO THE PRODUCTION OF ENERGY. WE’VE SAID, LET’S PROTECT THE VALLEY. IT’S THE LAST PIECE OF OUR BACKYARD THAT’S RELATIVELY UNTOUCHED.”

Chief Roland Willson, West Moberly First Nations

If completed, the Site C dam will flood more than 100 km of the Peace River and its tributaries. The flooding will destroy graves and sacred sites, moose calving grounds and areas where First Nations families hunt, fish and gather berries and medicines.



Photo: Andrea Morrison

An historic Treaty with First Nations in northeast BC clearly affirms their right to maintain their traditional harvesting practices. In fact, historic records show that Canada’s Treaty Commissioner made a “solemn” promise to First Nations that “there would be no forced interference” with their way of life.

Despite this, the federal and provincial governments approved the Site C dam without the consent of First Nations and without considering whether the destruction of the Peace River Valley would violate Canada’s legal Treaty obligations.

As a result, the West Moberly and Prophet River First Nations have been forced to go to court just to have their Treaty rights considered. In response, the BC government has argued that the Treaty only protects the right of First Nations to hunt and fish somewhere in their traditional territories and does not obligate the



government to protect specific areas, no matter how important they are from a cultural or ecological standpoint.

Extensive resource development in northeast BC – including previous dams on the Peace River, logging, mining, and massive oil and gas development – has already greatly reduced the areas where First Nations can practice their cultures and traditions. A report by Global Forest Watch Canada, published before the Site C dam was approved, found that two-thirds of all land in the region was already within five km of some form of resource development.

The Peace River Valley is the most pristine natural area within easy reach of First Nations like West Moberly and the urban centre of Fort St. John where many Indigenous people live. The few other areas in the region that remain relatively intact are much more remote and therefore difficult for community members, especially elders and youth, to access. This has direct consequences for the ability of First Nations pass on their cultures and traditions to future generations.

**FOR OTHER WAYS TO TAKE ACTION, PLEASE VISIT
WWW.AMNESTY.CA/DEFENDINGWATER**

In August 2007, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – one of the independent expert bodies charged with monitoring state compliance with international human rights laws – called for an immediate halt to construction of the Site C dam. The Committee takes the case so seriously that in December 2018 it repeated its call under a special emergency and urgent action procedure. As of this date, the federal and provincial governments have not responded.

The first hearings in the Treaty rights lawsuit are expected to begin in 2022. In the meantime, construction of the dam proceeds. Logging, road construction and other preparatory activities threaten sites that First Nations have identified as crucial cultural and ecological areas.

The BC government has never provided a credible explanation of why it's building a project that exceeds expected energy needs or why it hasn't invested in cheaper, less destructive alternatives instead.

ACT NOW

First Nations should not have to take on the enormous expense of launching a court case to have their Constitutionally-protected rights respected. BC should stop Site C and invest in other less destructive alternatives. At the very least, the federal and provincial governments should suspend all permits and approvals while the Treaty rights case is before the courts.

Please write to the BC Premier. Write in your own words, emphasizing some, or all of the following points.

- The Site C dam should not have been approved in the first place. Fortunately, it's not too late to prevent the severe, permanent and irreversible harm identified by the environmental impact assessment.
- As demonstrated by the arguments that BC has already made in court, the only way the province can defend the project is by denigrating Treaty rights. This is incompatible with the promise of reconciliation and the obligation of all governments to uphold and promote human rights without discrimination.
- The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has twice called for a halt to construction of the Site C dam. A government can't claim to champion human rights while at the same time ignoring the UN's top anti-racism body.

Please write to:

Premier John Horgan
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