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Human rights and church organizations send message to Alberta government: suspend pipeline until Lubicon rights are respected

EDMONTON, ALBERTA – Amnesty International Canada and KAIROS, a social justice organization of Canadian churches, have joined the Lubicon Lake Indian Nation in calling for an immediate suspension to plans to build a jumbo natural gas pipeline through Lubicon lands in northern Alberta.

On Friday, October 10, the Alberta Utilities Commission approved an application by the TransCanada Pipelines subsidiary NOVA Gas Transmission Ltd. to construct a massive pipeline through Lubicon territory to supply natural gas for oil sands extraction. The application was brought forward without any agreement with the Lubicon.

“The Lubicon Nation has never approved this pipeline,” said Lubicon Lake Indian Nation Councillor Dwight Gladue. “We’ve told TransCanada that they need to respect our land rights but they won’t commit to dealing with us. TransCanada needs to suspend construction of this pipeline until they’ve obtained our approval to proceed. These are our lands. We don’t intend to allow them to walk all over us.”

United Nations bodies have repeatedly called on governments in Canada to ensure that oil and gas development on disputed Lubicon lands does not cause any further harm to the health, culture and other human rights of the Lubicon Cree. This August, the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concerns about the TransCanada proposal in a letter to the Canadian ambassador to the United Nations.

Alex Neve, the Secretary General of Amnesty International Canada, and Ed Bianchi of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, visited the Lubicon territory this week.

“Governments in Canada have demonstrated blatant disregard for the rights of the Lubicon Cree and for the international human rights standards Canada has

pledged to uphold,” said Alex Neve. “This has to stop. Resolution of this land dispute must be a priority for both the federal and provincial governments. Until the rights of Lubicon are finally secured, large scale development projects like the TransCanada pipeline should not go ahead without their agreement.”

The Lubicon have never entered into a treaty with Canada and have never given up their rights and jurisdiction over their lands. An estimated 2000 oil and gas wells drilled on Lubicon land since 1979 have had a devastating impact on the Lubicon economy and way of life.

KAIROS has previously written to TransCanada on behalf of shareholders asking the company to address Lubicon concerns. Ed Bianchi said today, “As long as there is a dispute over those lands, it’s irresponsible for TransCanada to proceed with the approval of only one side in that dispute. TransCanada has taken sides in the Lubicon land dispute in support of a government whose violation of Lubicon rights has been condemned by the United Nations.”

Amnesty International and KAIROS are calling on Alberta to suspend any approvals or licenses for the project until the company resolves its dispute with the Lubicon Nation.

Today, Amnesty International is launching a new global appeal in support of the rights of the Lubicon Cree.

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