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2024

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ACTIVIST



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Thanks to the featured human
rights defenders for trusting us
with their stories.

Next Print Issue

The next issue is scheduled for
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International



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It's official — members love the new *Activist!*

In this issue, you'll find more letter-writing actions to take, plus a keepsake poster celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thank you to all the members who took the time to comment on the reimaged *Activist*. Write to the Editor at aahmad@amnesty.ca.



Not a member yet? Want to be?

Contact our office or sign up at our Amnesty website:
www.amnesty.ca





Greetings from Board Chair Agapi Gessesse



Dear Members of Amnesty International Canada English Speaking Section,

I hope this message finds you well and in good spirits. As the new Board Chair, I am honoured and humbled to address you through this newsletter. I want to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude for your unwavering support and dedication to our cause. Your commitment to defending human rights is truly commendable and inspires us all.

We find ourselves in unprecedented times, facing challenges that directly threaten the very essence of human rights. It is crucial that we stand together, united in our pursuit of justice and equality. Our mission to protect and promote human rights has never been more vital.

As the Board, our priority this year is to further enhance our efforts in upholding human rights. We are dedicated to improving our tactics and strategies, ensuring that our approach remains effective and impactful. In addition, we will be reviewing and strengthening our governance practices across the organization, ensuring transparency and accountability in all our endeavors.

Furthermore, we recognize the significance of engaging our membership, particularly with the youth, as they are the future torchbearers of human rights. By actively involving and empowering the younger generation, we can create a lasting impact and foster a culture of activism and change.

Securing the necessary resources is essential to continue the amazing work we do. We will strive to ensure that we have the means to support our initiatives effectively, enabling us to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who need it most.

This address is significant to me personally, as it marks my first communication with you in this magazine as the Board Chair. I have stepped into this role because I felt a deep connection to the membership and a strong desire to bring about positive change. I firmly believe that organizations are built by people, and our strength lies in the collective power of individuals like you. I am called to something higher than myself, and I am honoured to have the opportunity to serve alongside you in our shared mission.

We find ourselves in unprecedented times, facing challenges that directly threaten the very essence of human rights.

In conclusion, let us remember that our work is not just about Amnesty International; it is about the lives we change, the justice we seek, and the hope we instill. Together, we have the power to make a difference, to create a world where human rights are respected and protected for all. I am inspired by your unwavering commitment and look forward to the incredible impact we will make together.

Thank you once again for your ongoing support. Stay safe, stay strong, and let us continue to fight for a better future.

Warm regards,
Agapi Gessesse
Board Chair

Letter from the Secretary General

Dear Amnesty Family,

If you have been watching the news lately, you would be forgiven for thinking we are in a collective tunnel, where hope seems naïve or irrelevant at best, and no clear end is in sight. Yet, history reminds us that none of the deep injustices we are witnessing daily, from Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, to Afghanistan, Wet'suwet'en Territory or Sudan, are new to humankind. Our world has always faced periods of profound devastation and global uncertainty. What fascinates and comforts me is that, throughout this painful history, groups of people committed to a more just and freer world have always existed. People driven and determined enough to move beyond despair and act on their beliefs. I am inspired by the student movements protesting across the globe, risking their academic success, wellbeing, and freedom, in solidarity with Palestinian victims in Gaza and the West Bank.

Just over 75 years ago, in the aftermath of World War II and the horror of the Holocaust, through the bold vision and tireless work of such determined people (including a Canadian and founding member of Amnesty International Canada, John Peters Humphrey), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was born on December 10, 1948. I like to call it the Declaration of Hope. "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights": a simple but revolutionary statement that has shaped constitutions and laws around the world.

What fascinates and comforts me is that, throughout this painful history, groups of people committed to a more just and freer world have always existed.

Recently, I was honoured to host Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at our Ottawa office, on unceded Algonquin and Anishinaabe territory, during his visit to Canada. With several leading Canadian advocates, we reflected on the urgency of the Declaration and its promise. If there was ever a moment to rekindle our candle and the hope of human rights for every person, it is now.



Across Canada and the world, we must continue to demand the respect of Indigenous Peoples's rights, racial justice, a healthy planet, the rights of all gendered peoples, refugees, and migrants. Indeed, equal rights and justice for all the "deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard" as wisely notes author and activist Arundhati Roy, who faces prosecution in India for comments she made over a decade ago. I urge you to recommit to activism, to hold the line on human rights. 75 years later, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights calls on us to rise stronger than ever against the spectre of a world without laws, a world where the strongest and the most dangerous survive at the expense of the rest of us: the poor, the gendered, the racialized, the disabled, the othered. And at the expense of our most vital commodity: our shared humanity.

In these turbulent times, I hope you will hold steadfast to the belief that you are the candle and that change begins with you.

Thank you for all you do. I look forward to continuing to stir "good trouble" and fighting for justice together this year.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead.

Ketty Nivyabandi
Secretary General



Annual General Meeting

Ottawa hosted the 2023 in-person Annual General Meeting from June 16–18, 2023. Members and activists came together to inspire one another, learn about campaigns, share stories, participate in workshops and panel discussions, and vote on resolutions and governance of Amnesty Canada (English speaking Section). A well-attended Human Rights College offered a dynamic space for youth to learn and lead prior to the AGM.



- 1. Amnesty leaders take questions from the floor
- 2. Amnesty members rallying for climate justice during the AGM
- 3. Members of the 2023 Human Rights College
- 4. A Carleton University campus groundhog, one of the unofficial mascots of the Amnesty AGM

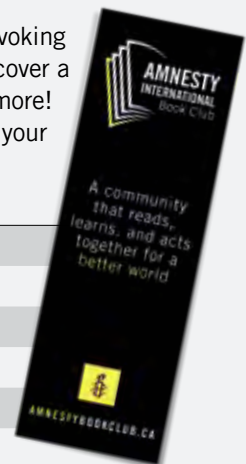


Amnesty Book Club

Our Amnesty Book Club is back for 2024 and we've selected six thought-provoking works of fiction closely aligned with our human rights work for you to enjoy. Discover a new book every two months in 2024 and join in author events, giveaways, and more!

Sign up at www.amnestybookclub.ca to get our Discussion Guides and share your love for books and human rights with friends, family, and communities. These are our titles for 2024

January/February	<i>The Sleeping Car Porter</i> by Suzette Mayr
March/April	<i>Yellowface</i> by R.F. Kuang
May/June	<i>What Strange Paradise</i> by Omar El Akkad
July/August	<i>The Story of Us</i> by Catherine Hernandez
September/October	<i>Bad Cree</i> by Jessica Johns
November/December	<i>The Immortal King Rao</i> by Vauhini Vara





SOLIDARITY WITH CRIMINALIZED DEFENDERS

PROTECTING INDIGENOUS WET'SUWET'EN LAND



© Aili McCracken/Amnesty International

PREVIOUS PAGE:

Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chief Na'moks is one of the most visible and vocal defenders of his Nation's rights. (Alli McCracken/Amnesty International)

RIGHT: Construction on the Coastal GasLink on unceded Wet'suwet'en land continues without the free, prior and informed consent of the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs.



© Alli McCracken/Amnesty International

CANADA is a country that prides itself as being a human rights leader. Yet it is committing human rights violations by approving and financing environmentally destructive extractive megaprojects, carried out without the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Nations.

In British Columbia, the Wet'suwet'en Nation is protecting its territory and sacred sites against the construction of the Coastal GasLink (CGL) liquefied natural gas pipeline. The Wet'suwet'en hold title and rights to their 22,000 kilometres of territory, and their Chiefs say they have not consented to the pipeline according to their laws and customs.

For speaking out in protection of their rights, Wet'suwet'en land defenders and their supporters have become targets of surveillance, harassment, intimidation, and unlawful arrest at the hands of the pipeline's private security company, CGL employees, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and its specialized Critical Response Unit (CRU). From January 2019 to March 2023, the RCMP conducted four violent police raids against Indigenous land defenders and allies opposed to the construction of the Coastal GasLink (CGL) pipeline on Wet'suwet'en territory. Police arbitrarily arrested and detained more than 75 land defenders and observers. About 20 land defenders were charged by the B.C. Prosecution Service for allegedly disobeying a court order to stay away from pipeline construction sites, even though these sites are situated on the Nation's unceded, ancestral land.

Five years after the first RCMP raid on Wet'suwet'en territory, the criminalization of Indigenous land defenders opposed to the Coastal GasLink pipeline persists. The B.C. government dropped charges facing a handful of land defenders but pursued convictions against about a dozen others. Several land defenders pleaded guilty because of

their restrictive bail conditions, which prohibited them from being on the Wet'suwet'en Nation's territory and participating in frontline resistance actions against extractive projects across Canada. At least four land defenders were convicted on criminal contempt charges, though three are appealing the judge's decision on constitutional grounds.

Five more land defenders, arrested and charged with criminal contempt during a March 2023 raid, still face charges. If found guilty, they could be sentenced to prison — simply for defending their traditional territory in accordance with Wet'suwet'en law. Unwilling to be silenced, many continue to speak out, raising a strong voice heard around the world for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Nations.

Sleydo'

Sleydo' (Molly Wickham) is Wing Chief of Cas Yikh, a house group of the Wet'suwet'en Nation's Gidimt'en Clan, and a spokesperson for the Gidimt'en Checkpoint. She was one of more than two dozen people arrested in November 2021 during an RCMP crackdown to dismantle Wet'suwet'en blockades. She lives on her family's territory in a cabin she built in 2012.

Sleydo' is perhaps the most visible land and water protector trying to stop the pipeline's construction — and one of several women leaders in the movement. Being on the frontlines of the struggle to defend her Nation's ancestral territory, she has experienced a multitude of harassment and surveillance for her work.

"In the past, the private security company guards have parked right outside camp, and they could see inside. They were using their phones to film us, film our kids. We have no control over what they're doing with that footage. We just know some ex-police, ex-military men have images of our children from a space that's supposed to be our space — our safe space."
(Continued on page 7)

Reflecting on Courage and Resilience A Journey on Wet'suwet'en Territory

Amnesty International Canada Corporate Accountability and Climate Justice Campaigner Melak Mengistab Gebresilassie returned to Wet'suwet'en territory in August 2023 for the Nation's third annual Peace and Unity Summit. This event fosters solidarity and mutual learning among Indigenous Peoples, leaders, and supporters from diverse backgrounds. Here are some excerpts from Melak's blog about his experiences at the Summit.

Rafting down the Wedzin Kwa

The excitement was palpable on the morning of August 13 as we gathered for our rafting adventure on the Wedzin Kwa River.

We were greeted warmly by Chief Na'Moks, Gaylene, Anna, and others at the meeting point, setting the tone for a journey built on mutual respect and understanding. As our group converged on the sacred Wet'suwet'en territory, we embarked on a breathtaking drive along Morice Forest Service Road, surrounded by partners, children, and even some furry friends.

Our destination was Wedzin Bin, or Morice Lake, nestled among the cradle of mountain glaciers. It's the heartbeat of the Wedzin Kwa River, celebrated for its purity, and revered as a source of healing. Chief Woos, a Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chief, extended a warm ceremonial welcome, inviting us to experience the Gidimt'en territory and its rich culture.

The Gidimt'en matriarchs and youth leaders serenaded us with songs of unity and shared purpose. They reminded me of the profound connection between the Wet'suwet'en People and their ancestral lands.

Our rafting experience on the Wedzin Kwa began with Chief Woos encouraging us to embrace the journey fully. He urged us to drink from the



Amnesty International Canada's Melak Mengistab Gebresilassie (front) visited Wet'suwet'en territory in northern British Columbia in May 2023 as part of a delegation researching the criminalization of Wet'suwet'en land defenders opposed to the construction of the CGL pipeline.

river's pristine waters and immerse ourselves in its natural beauty. Sipping from a river untouched by pollution was a poignant reminder of the commitment of the Wet'suwet'en land and water defenders to safeguard this culturally and environmentally significant land.

A sobering moment at the drilling pad

As we approached the drilling pad operated by Coastal GasLink (CGL), our rafting guide delivered unsettling news. The water beneath the drilling pad was no longer safe to drink. This site symbolizes a contentious point of conflict. CGL continues to drill beneath the riverbed despite widespread concerns for the environment and Indigenous rights.

As we gathered on the riverbank, young Wet'suwet'en rafters shared their fears and stories with us. They highlighted their deep concern for the river's health, salmon habitats, their cultural heritage, and the government's inadequate response to their concerns.

A heartwarming welcome at Unist'ot'en Healing Centre

Past the drilling pad, our spirits lifted as we approached the Unis'to'en Healing Centre. The air was filled with melodies as Unist'ot'en matriarchs stood at the bridge, drumming and welcoming us with open hearts.

Chief Na'moks, Chief Woos, and Unist'ot'en matriarchs Freda, Brenda, and Dr. Karla welcomed us. They invited

us to connect with the river's healing energy by dipping our feet in its waters — an experience I will forever cherish.

The evening at the Unist'ot'en Healing Centre was an occasion to celebrate the remarkable spirit of matriarch Freda. She set up the healing centre to restore her people's connection with the land and provide them with a space of renewal and reconnection. Freda's tireless efforts were recognized when she received the Right Livelihood Award in 2021, an honour often referred to as an alternative Nobel Prize.

Throughout our journey, the strong partnership of the Gidimt'en clan and the Unist'ot'en clans was evident. Amnesty International Canada gifted tents, t-shirts, and beanie hats as tokens of appreciation for our hosts' warm hospitality and dedication to human rights.

My rafting adventure on Wedzin Kwa highlighted the Wet'suwet'en People's bond with their land. I was impressed by the river's pure waters and the resilience of the Wet'suwet'en People despite the challenges they face. My journey illuminated for me the unbreakable bond between the Wet'suwet'en Peoples and their ancestral territory.

Amnesty International is proud to stand in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en Nation and all Indigenous Peoples as we continue our journey towards justice and equality for all. Together, we can make a difference.



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Sleydo' (Molly Wickham), Wing Chief of the Cas Yikh House, is a Wet'suwet'en land defender and spokesperson for the Gidimt'en Checkpoint.

(Continued from page 5)

"People have the misconception that Canada is creating reconciliation relationships with Indigenous people. But really we're experiencing the same kinds of repression, violence, and genocide that's happening to all the Indigenous people in the world in all the other countries and lands that are being destroyed, and the cumulative effects that are destroying our planet."

"We're fighting for our future generations, for our clean drinking water, for the salmon that our people rely on, for all of the work that we do to create a better place for our children. We need support and solidarity. We need you to do whatever you can do to get boots on the ground in whatever country you're in to put pressure on so-called Canada to stop destroying our homes."

"There are investors in these projects that are benefiting from the genocide of our people from the daily criminalization and harassment and intimidation by specialized units of police that are designed to push industry through. We know that if this can happen to us in our territories — if we can be pushed off our lands, if our lands can be destroyed and our people be criminalized and put in jail — we know that it's going to happen to other people. And we don't want that to happen."

"We have to set a precedent by working together. We have to find whatever ways that we can to work alongside each other to put pressure on the financiers of projects like the Coastal GasLink pipeline, projects that are happening in your communities. We're asking from people to put pressure on the Canadian government and to put pressure on the financial institutions that are destroying our home and that are ruining the futures of our children, and to take whatever action you're capable of taking — whatever action is going to force them to respect our rights as Indigenous people and our rights as human beings."

TAKE ACTION

ONLINE ACTION

International Secretariat: Respect Indigenous Rights on Wet'suwet'en Territory

www.amnesty.org/en/petition/respeto-los-derechos-indigenas-en-el-territorio-wetsuweten

Amnesty Canada: Canada Respect Indigenous Rights on Wet'suwet'en Territory

takeaction.amnesty.ca/page/98880/action/1

Amnesty Canada — sign the petition

www.amnesty.org/en/petition/respect-indigenous-rights-on-wetsuweten-territory/

PRESS RELEASE

Canada fails to respond to Wet'suwet'en Nation's claims in hearing at Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, July 11, 2023

www.amnesty.ca/human-rights-news/wetsuweten-nation-inter-american-commission/

Canada: UN Special Rapporteur's visit must shift 'glacial progress' on Indigenous rights, March 1, 20213

amnesty.ca/human-rights-news/canada-un-special-rapporteur-indigenous-rights/

VIDEO

Human Rights Situation of Wet'suwet'en Indigenous Peoples in Canada / Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, July 10, 2023

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2W2KpljDhLo

ACTIVISM GUIDE

Criminalization of Wet'suwet'en land defenders.

February 9, 2023

amnesty.ca/activism-guide/criminalization-of-wetsuweten-land-defenders/

Earth Month: Take action in April and beyond, April 4, 2023

www.amnesty.ca/activism-guide/earth-month-take-action-in-april-and-beyond/

BLOG

Canada: Indigenous land defenders criminalized, surveilled and harassed as pipeline construction continues on Wet'suwet'en territory. January 6, 2023

www.amnesty.ca/blog/canada-indigenous-land-defenders-criminalized

LINKS

www.yintahaccess.com

unistoten.camp

www.youtube.com/@GidimtenAccessPoint

URGENT ACTION

Canada: Indigenous land defenders at risk, June 22, 2022.

Index Number: AMR 20/5745/2022:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr20/5745/2022/en/

Escalating Criminalization of Wet'suwet'en Land Defenders

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DECEMBER 2018: The British Columbia Supreme Court granted Coastal GasLink's (CGL) request for an interim injunction forbidding land defenders from blockading the main road through Wet'suwet'en territory.

JANUARY 2019, FEBRUARY 2020, NOVEMBER 2021 and MARCH 2023: During four large-scale police raids in response to the Wet'suwet'en Nation asserting its rights, RCMP teams arrested and detained more than 75 people, including legal observers and members of the media. During these raids, police were equipped with military assault weapons, helicopters, and dog units. Agents damaged buildings and desecrated ceremonial spaces while removing land defenders from the territory. The RCMP also set up an exclusion zone on Wet'suwet'en territory, blocking the movement and access of Indigenous people, media, legal observers, food, and medicines.

2019

FEBRUARY 2019: The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs called for a stop-work order on the CGL pipeline in accordance with the Nation's law.

2020

DECEMBER 2019: The B.C. Supreme Court granted an interlocutory injunction, which includes enforcement provisions.

2021

JANUARY 2020 and NOVEMBER 2021: The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs issued eviction notices to Coastal GasLink. Federal Canadian authorities, provincial authorities of British Columbia, the pipeline company and its private security firm do not respect the eviction orders. Instead, using the court injunction issued by B.C., they have forcibly removed, racially profiled, surveilled, harassed, and unlawfully arrested Wet'suwet'en land defenders, Hereditary Chiefs, and matriarchs through militarized police raids on their territories.

A Right to Consent, a Strong Will to Resist

Why have Wet'suwet'en land defenders held so strong in their resistance to the Coastal GasLink pipeline in the face of startling intimidation, surveillance, and state violence? At the heart of their struggle is the Wet'suwet'en Nation's connection to the *yintah* — their unceded ancestral territory. The land is sacred to the Wet'suwet'en, and it's the foundation of cultural traditions, stories, and ways of living dating back many hundreds of years.

So it shouldn't come as a surprise that all five clans of the Wet'suwet'en Nation oppose the construction of the CGL pipeline on their territory. If the 670-kilometre pipeline is completed, it will divide Wet'suwet'en territory into two and transport fracked gas to the proposed LNG Canada processing plant. The pipeline was approved by the B.C. Oil and Gas Commission (now the B.C. Energy Regulator) and has the support of the governments of Canada and British Columbia.

Wet'suwet'en leaders are especially concerned about the threat of contamination hanging over the Wedzin Kwa (Morice River), where members of the Nation still drink the pristine waters and fish for salmon, just as their ancestors did. And, like Indigenous Nations across the globe, they find themselves on the front lines of climate change, acutely aware of the havoc a warming planet will wreak on their lives and rights.

Importantly, the Wet'suwet'en Nation has a right to say no. The Nation has never sold, surrendered or in any way relinquished their collective title to their ancestral territories. They have continued to exercise their unbroken, unextinguished, and unceded right to govern and occupy their lands. With the support of all five Wet'suwet'en clans, the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs — whose role as the traditional governing authority of the Nation was reaffirmed in the Supreme Court of Canada's 1997

JULY 2022: The then-Attorney General of British Columbia, David Eby, decided to prosecute 19 land defenders with criminal contempt for allegedly defying the court injunction keeping land defenders away from pipeline construction sites. As premier, Eby has since appointed Vancouver MLA Niki Sharma as attorney general.

MARCH 2023: Francisco Calí Tzay, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, made a 10-day visit to Canada. In a press release capping off his fact-finding mission, Calí Tzay expressed concern about the "ongoing militarization of Indigenous lands and the criminalization of Indigenous human rights defenders resisting the Trans Mountain and Coastal GasLink pipelines in British Columbia."

JULY 2023: Calí Tzay released his final report on his mission to Canada. In the report, he acknowledged that "Indigenous Peoples are taking up the fight for climate justice by opposing the construction of TC Energy's Coastal GasLink pipeline and the Federal Government-[owned] Trans Mountain pipeline, projects approved without the consent of all affected Indigenous Peoples." He called on Canada to "suspend large-scale mining and other business activities in the Ring of Fire region and cease construction or operation of the Coastal GasLink, Trans Mountain and Line 5 pipelines, until the free, prior and informed consent of the Indigenous Peoples affected is secured." He also urged Canada to "halt the criminalization of Indigenous human rights defenders peacefully defending their lands and resources from extractive industries and other business actors."

2022

2023

2024

12 DECEMBER 2022: Five land defenders pleaded guilty, resulting in a \$500 fine for three and 25 hours of community service for the other two.

NOVEMBER 2023: Two Indigenous land defenders pleaded guilty, while another, Sabina Dennis, fought her criminal contempt charge in court. She was eventually acquitted.

DECEMBER 2023: Amnesty International published '*Removed from Our Land for Defending It: Criminalization, Intimidation and Harassment of Wet'suwet'en Land Defenders*'. Documenting the experiences of nearly two dozen Wet'suwet'en land defenders, this groundbreaking report outlines a litany of rights abuses and violations committed against the Wet'suwet'en Nation and its allies on the part of the Canadian government, the province of B.C., Coastal GasLink owners TC Energy, and its private security contractors. The report provides governments and industry with concrete recommendations on how to remedy the rights violations and prevent similar ones from being committed in the future.

JANUARY 2024: B.C. judge Michael Tammen convicted Sleydo', Gitksan land defender Shaylynn Sampson, and Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) land defender Corey Jocko for violating the B.C. court injunction. The land defenders' lawyer petitioned to have the convictions thrown out on the basis that the land defenders' *Charter* rights were violated during their arrests. A hearing into the issue is scheduled for June 2024.

FEBRUARY 2024: Chief Dsta'hyl, of the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs, becomes the latest Wet'suwet'en land defender to be convicted of criminal contempt for defending his Nation's territory and rights.

Delgamuukw-Gisdaywa decision — have never approved the pipeline.

Nevertheless, construction is proceeding, in violation of 'Anuc niwh'it'en (Wet'suwet'en law), Canadian constitutional law, and the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), which holds that infrastructure and resource-extraction projects must not go ahead without the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) of the Indigenous Nations whose territory is affected.

Since 2009, Wet'suwet'en land defenders have established several sites and structures on the land to affirm their jurisdiction over the territory. More recently, the Wet'suwet'en have implemented a FPIC protocol that requires any visitors to the territory to seek permission from the Hereditary Chiefs to enter. CGL has never requested nor received this permission, nor does it have the Nation's consent to operate on the territory. (Some band councils, leadership structures created under Canada's colonial *Indian Act*, consented to the pipeline in exchange for financial compensation.)

(Continued next page)



Pipeline infrastructure.

© Colette Lelièvre (Amnistie internationale Canada francophone).

(Continued from previous page)

Defending Wet'suwet'en rights and territory has not been easy. Forces no less powerful and well-resourced than the Canadian state and Coastal GasLink's owner, the multi-billion-dollar energy giant TC Energy, have worked hard to sideline Indigenous Nations opposed to the project. Over the years, the tactics employed to marginalize the Wet'suwet'en have escalated from flawed consultations and B.C.'s regulatory approval of the CGL pipeline without the free, prior, and informed consent of the Wet'suwet'en into what is now a campaign of criminalization and state violence — due in part to a B.C. court decision to grant a CGL-requested injunction banning land defenders from impeding the construction of the pipeline.

In 2020 and 2021 alone, Canadian authorities spent nearly \$20 million to surveil and police Wet'suwet'en land defenders, Indigenous neighbours such as the Gitksan, and other allies. Factor in the millions more spent on enforcement over the past three years and the breathtaking violence police deployed in their four large-scale raids on Wet'suwet'en land defenders, and one gets a clearer picture of the extreme measures the Canadian political and corporate establishment will take to undermine Indigenous Nations who dare to assert their rights.

The international community has taken notice of Canada's deplorable treatment of the Wet'suwet'en Nation — and Wet'suwet'en land defenders resistance to it. During his 10-day visit to Canada in March 2023, the UN's Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples raised concerns about Indigenous rights violations surrounding the approval and construction of the CGL pipeline. In his

end-of-mission statement, Special Rapporteur Francisco Calí Tzay said he was “concerned about the ongoing militarization of Indigenous lands and the criminalization of Indigenous human rights defenders resisting the Trans Mountain and Coastal GasLink pipelines in British Columbia.”

Additionally, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has called on Canada to suspend all permits and approvals for the construction of the CGL pipeline until the free, prior, and informed consent of the Wet'suwet'en people is obtained. The CERD issued two letters to Canada — one in 2020 and the other in 2022 —

urging Canada to stop the criminalization, surveillance, and escalating use of force against Wet'suwet'en land defenders. The Canadian government has not yet submitted the requested periodic reports to CERD on measures it has taken to implement the committee's recommendations.

In 2020 and 2021 alone, Canadian authorities spent nearly \$20 million to surveil and police Wet'suwet'en land defenders, Indigenous neighbours such as the Gitksan, and other allies.

Amnesty's International's research has identified several violations of human rights against Wet'suwet'en land defenders. Some of the human rights violations include: arbitrary arrest; an arrest condition that can constitute inhuman or degrading treatment; racial discrimination; and threats and acts of gender-based violence. Based on these findings, Amnesty International has been calling on the B.C. government to drop charges against criminalized Wet'suwet'en land defenders, withdraw police and private security forces from the Wet'suwet'en Nation's territory, and otherwise halt the harassment, intimidation, unlawful surveillance, and criminalization of Wet'suwet'en land defenders.



Write for Rights 2023 By the Numbers

You did it! Because of the enthusiasm of Amnesty International Canada members and activists, last year's Write for Rights campaign was our most impactful yet. How loudly did you raise your voice for human rights? Just consider the data.

125,000+
total actions taken by members — an Amnesty International Canada record!



210
letter-writing events Canada-wide — up 56% from 2022

6
original works of art commissioned by Amnesty International Canada and brought to life by youth activists



35+
school-based Write-a-Thons



34
organic media mentions — including stories by CTV, CBC Radio, Black Press Media, Niagara This Week, and more



Writing for human rights all year round

For Amnesty activists, letter-writing for justice isn't confined to the annual Write for Rights campaign — it's an activity for all seasons. Case in point: members of Amnesty's Quinte / Belleville group in southeastern Ontario gathered on November 7, 2023 to pen letters in support of Uyghur Canadian human rights activist Huseyin Celil.

While visiting Uzbekistan in 2006, Celil was arrested by the local authorities, who handed over to the Chinese state. China later convicted Celil on dubious charges in response to his activism for Uyghur rights. He was held in solitary confinement for the early years of his imprisonment. Unfortunately, no one has heard from him since 2016.

Despite this silence, Amnesty International Canada activists across Canada persist in their efforts to free Celil and support his wife, Kamila, and their two children. Whatever the outcome, because of the efforts of his family, his lawyer, and dedicated human rights activists across Canada, Huseyin Celil's case has not been — and will not be — forgotten.



1. In St. Mary's, Ontario, writers kept warm with coffee, scarves and a side of friendly conversation. 2. Participants in the Write-A-Thon at Queen's University smile for the camera. 3. Holiday decorations and bright yellow Amnesty swag made for a festive Write for Rights season at Armbrae Academy in Halifax. 4 and 5. A letter-writing event at the University of Regina was among the 35-plus Write-A-Thons hosted at schools, colleges and universities. 6. A Write for Rights supporter shows off his letter calling for Tunisian authorities to stop prosecution against opposition figure Chaima Issa.



Simple Acts, Great Impacts

Our Urgent Action Network

KIMBERLY Lyons is a nomadic farmer with the Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms. She is always on the move, from one rural setting to the other, promoting ecological farming and sustainability practices.

The nature of her work makes it challenging for her to be part of grassroots movements. But as a member of the Urgent Action Network, Kimberly can support human rights. All she needs is access to WiFi or a post office!

Perhaps there are no Amnesty groups in your community, or like Kimberly, you cannot commit to regular meetings — but you can take a few minutes to write a letter, send an email, or post to social media. It's a simple, yet effective and practical way to help protect individuals and communities at risk of human rights violations.

Urgent action is a rapid response technique that activates over half a million Amnesty International activists and supporters worldwide who send urgent letters, faxes, or emails to the authorities in the most urgent cases of human rights violations.

The first urgent action was issued in 1973 when Prof Luis Basilio Rossi, a Brazilian professor and critic of Brazil's military regime at that time was forcefully disappeared. It was not until the letters started to pour in that Rossi's family were allowed to see visit him. He was subsequently released in October 1973, after several months in detention.

Rossi attributed his release to the “innumerable amount of people... for their continued interest in our situation, faced with the violence that has been let loose on us.”

Fifty years later, sending messages in response to urgent rapid mass appeals remains one of the most effective actions you can take to help those in danger of torture, ill-treatment, forced eviction, execution, and other human rights violations. The hundreds of individuals who have been released from prison or granted access to legal



© Kimberly Lyons

ABOVE: Amnesty Urgent Action Network member Kimberly Lyons with a friend.



LEFT: Some of the many human rights defenders with whom the Urgent Action Network has mobilized in solidarity.

representation and healthcare while in detention, bear testament to the power of urgent actions.

In a world where we are constantly bombarded with news of varying degrees of human rights abuses and violations, helplessness and despair are common reactions that most of us feel. Writing a letter from the comfort and safety of your room may sound overly simplistic - it is anything but.

And as the author and poet, Zadie Smith reminds us, “progress is never permanent, [it] will always be threatened, [it] must be redoubled, restated and reimagined if it is to survive.”

JOIN THE URGENT ACTION NETWORK TODAY AND HELP ADVANCE THE CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

You can sign up online or contact Tawakalitu Braimah, our Urgent Actions Network Coordinator at UrgentAction@amnesty.ca.

CONTENT WARNING

This interview includes references to experiences of racism and thoughts of suicide. Please take care when reading



Campaigns We Love

Activist Profile – Fight for the Soul of Canada

In a Q&A with the *Activist*, anti-racism advocate Nicholas Marcus Thompson delves into the origins of a groundbreaking class-action lawsuit pushing back five+ decades of systemic discrimination against Black workers in the federal public service (*Ed. note: Amnesty International Canada has been granted status as an independent intervenor in the court case*).

As the Executive Director of the Black Class Action Secretariat, Thompson reflects upon the generations of Black workers whose stories fuel his activism and shares his efforts to address anti-Black racism inside the labour movement.

Launching a class action lawsuit against the federal government on behalf of thousands of Black public servants is not the standard approach to defending workers' rights. Where did the idea come from?

Historically, workers followed the traditional route. They went through the grievance process. They went through the Canadian Human Rights Commission. And prior to filing the claim, we had written to the Commissioner of the Canada Revenue Agency, the Minister of National Revenue, the Clerk of the Privy Council, the Prime Minister's Office, literally begging them to address anti-Black racism. And the origin of the class action was at the Canada Revenue Agency, where they had employed about 50,000 workers. And they had only about one or two Black executives throughout the entire country.

As a union activist, I raised issues about anti-Black racism to all those different office holders. And we worked very tirelessly to try to address the issue internally. And when all those attempts and pleas for help failed, that's when we started looking at external remedies.

This section of the *Activist* is dedicated to profiling the work of amazing activists and grassroots movements. If you would like to suggest future profiles, please contact the Editor at aahmad@amnesty.ca.



Executive Director of the Black Class Action Secretariat, Nicholas Marcus Thompson

In addition to the lack of adequate representation of Black workers at the leadership level, what are the most common experiences of anti-Black racist discrimination in the federal public service?

It ranges from racial slurs to environments that are not culturally accepting. It's a white manager telling a Black employee that, "We should go back to the good old days where we had slaves." Or a colleague drawing a monkey on a Black employee's desk. It's the deeply entrenched practices that are utilized to exclude Black workers, such as the employer using non-advertised staffing processes. The public service has a wide range of discretion in staffing, so they can temporarily appoint anyone to fill a position, to develop them for an operational need. And that's without any formal hiring process. Once that person has the required experience, then the employer would post the position, and they'd ask for that experience. Black workers don't have it, so they can't even apply.

You've gathered lots of stories of Black workers who have experienced systemic discrimination or racist treatment in the federal public service. Is there a personal story that will always stick with you?

There are so many stories, but what moves me the most is the stories of many women. They tell me how they worked for the public service their entire life. These women could be my grandmother, my mother, even my great-grandmother. They worked for the public service, tirelessly, for 30 years, 40 years, 50 years, in the same entry-level position. They've told me that at times, they've had suicidal ideation. About how the impact on them — on their families, their parenting, their relationships — is devastating. And then, when they



© Colette Lelièvre/Amnistie internationale Canada francophone

Thompson participated in a November 2023 webinar hosted by Amnesty International Canada at the United Nations in Geneva.

FROM LEFT: Ketty Nivyabandi, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canadian Section (English-Speaking); Nicholas Marcus Thompson, Executive Director of the Black Class Action Secretariat; Emilie Coyle, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies; Jérôme Bacon Saint-Onge, Vice-Chief, Conseil des Innus de Pessamit; Chief Na'moks, Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs, France-Isabelle Langlois, Director General, Amnistie internationale Canada francophone

retire, they have nothing to show for it. They're retiring broke, and broken, from the system. And what's really heartbreaking is, it's not like it just happened in one place or was a one-off. There's a concerted effort by the public service of Canada to deny Black people opportunities. The same issues are everywhere.

You have compiled remarkable statistics about outcomes for Black workers in the federal public service. How important are quantitative data to our collective understanding of the discrimination that Black workers face in the federal public service?

The data is a very important part of confirming the stories and experiences of workers. For example, the Government of Canada data clearly show that Black people are largely in entry-level positions. The government is meeting its employment equity-gap goals for visible minorities as a group. But when you look deeper into the data, Black employees are not the beneficiaries of that. The government is hiring Black people, and Black people represent the largest racialized group in the public service, but the lowest-paid group in the public service.

And all the data is there. Over a 30-year period, the Justice department hired approximately 2,000 people to permanent positions. And over that same period, only about 18 Black workers were hired to permanent positions. That's not even one per cent.

In your view, what impact does the underrepresentation of Black workers in the middle and senior levels have on the work of the government and its relationship with the public?

I think the impact is profound. Policies and processes that come out of the government are through a Eurocentric lens, and it's not representative of all Canadians' experiences. And that's not just limited to Black people, but it represents a wider problem of a public service that is not representative of the Canadians we serve. We don't have that diverse perspective on policies and cultures. If we had a truly diverse public service, then we would have the views and input of many Black, Indigenous, and racialized people and policies that are geared to all those different lenses, not just one lens. That would have a tremendous impact on our population.

What initially drew you into being a labour activist and organizer? What brought you into the movement?

I've always had a burning desire to seek justice and to speak up for those who don't have a voice. It was also my own situation of not being represented in the workplace by my union. That was part of the reason why I decided to be a part of the change. I felt as if I had the option of not doing anything, bashing the union, or becoming the union and utilizing the vehicle to push for the change that so many others needed, too.

Could you speak to challenges you've faced countering anti-Black racism in the labour movement?

One of the first things that I did was recognize that the problem was in the union and call on the union to address it internally. After all, how do we call on our neighbour to fix a problem that we're guilty of committing as well? I felt that there was a strong moral obligation for the union to take stock of its actions. That would allow it to be better positioned to challenge the government on the issue.

In 2020, we held the first anti-racism town hall in the union. We called out anti-Black racism in the union, forcing the union to do a lot of soul-searching, to come up with mechanisms to address underrepresentation within the union. Because the same issues, if not worse, exist in the union. But we recognize that unions are not going anywhere. They're a bargaining agent and they have a duty to represent workers, right?

Being an activist, taking the federal government to court, in addition to having a day job and a personal life, takes a toll. Amidst everything, what sustains you in your work?

My faith, my children, the support of my family, and the countless stories that fire me. The stories of workers, mothers, grandmothers. That they're thinking about suicide, or they have nowhere to turn to. And nobody else is doing this work. Nobody else viewed this as a crisis in the public service. That really keeps me up at night and keeps me going.

Whether you intended to or not, you're making history. But maybe you feel as though you didn't have a choice.

No. This is a necessary battle to ensure that thousands of current workers have justice. It's to ensure that generations of workers don't have to face these barriers, including the generational cycle of poverty within the Black community, due to discrimination at the state level, at the largest employer in the country. This is not an optional fight. This is a mandatory fight for the soul of Canada.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.



Our Solidarity is Vital for Threatened Water Defenders in Guapinol

THIS is the message that Amnesty Canada activists received from Juana Zúniga, a courageous member of the environmental defence committee of Guapinol in northern Honduras.

Juana and her neighbours have been mobilizing with enormous determination to defend the Guapinol River, an important source of water for the community. They are speaking out against the environmental impacts of an iron ore mine inside a conservation area.

These water defenders have paid a heavy price for denouncing serious irregularities in the mine authorization process and seeking to stop the project owned by one of the most powerful couples in Honduras.

On June 15, 2023, Guapinol River defender Oquelí Domínguez was killed by gunmen who also wounded his mother. Two co-founders of grassroots resistance to the mine, Jairo Bonilla and Aly Domínguez, were shot and killed on January 7, 2023.

Amnesty Canada activists were quick to respond, sending thousands of messages to authorities in Honduras calling for the killers to be brought to justice.

“Thank you for keeping your eyes on what is happening here. Every day, the situation becomes more dangerous for us. But we will not stop defending our water. We cannot thank you enough for your solidarity action. It gives us strength!”

Juana Zúniga

Like other leaders, Juana Zúniga has received terrifying death threats. “We live in fear,” she told us. “But we will not be silenced.”

Meanwhile, six water defenders were threatened with criminal prosecution for peacefully questioning the legality of the mine in the Carlos Escaleras National Park. We cannot forget that eight community members unjustly spent two years in jail before they were eventually freed. Amnesty International declared them prisoners of conscience and campaigned for their release.



Activists at the GTA Regional meeting in November 2023 show their solidarity with threatened water defenders in Guapinol. Their photo messages were shared with Honduran authorities to press for protection guarantees.

The situation in Guapinol reveals the dire effects of criminalization and life-threatening violence against those who speak up for the environment and climate justice across the Americas, the most dangerous region in the world to do this work.

If we are to survive the climate crisis, we must defend the defenders.

Amnesty Canada has a team of dedicated activists who are doing just that. In April 2023, they organized an Earth Day webinar that enabled Juana Zúniga to share powerful testimony from the frontlines of a David and Goliath battle to defend water and life.

TAKE ACTION

- Write a letter
- Sign the e-action
- Use social media to increase pressure for action

All instructions can be found in the Activism blog here: [amnesty.ca/activism-guide/take-action-to-support-defenders-of-justice-under-attack-in-central-america](https://www.amnesty.ca/activism-guide/take-action-to-support-defenders-of-justice-under-attack-in-central-america)

Interested in supporting inspiring, courageous environment defenders like Juana? Contact Elena Dumitru at edumitru@amnesty.ca to learn how.



Introducing:

Grassroots Activist Leaders!



The last issue of *The Activist* magazine featured an article about the work of local leaders called “Fieldworkers.” Recently, their Coordinating Council met to plan the future direction of the program and they have an update for us!

WE (Brandon, Kim, Corinne, Tosha, and Shauna) are so excited to share that after much reflection, brainstorming, and discussion on our DEI audit, we are officially rebranding from Fieldworkers to Grassroots Activist Leaders (GALs).

Grassroots Activist Leaders (GALs) work across Canada to promote the human rights movement at the community level. GALs guide and support activists and members to carry out the work of Amnesty International Canadian Section (English Speaking) (AICS(ES)) and foster human rights in their communities.

Beginning in November 2023, we will launch an exciting recruitment campaign to build our team of Grassroots Activist Leaders across Canada!

- GALs empower and amplify the work of local groups — student clubs, community groups, book clubs, etc. — members, and activists.
- GALs have a wide variety of skills and competencies that are practiced in a framework of anti-oppression, commitment to Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, collaboration, accessibility, and lifelong learning.
- GALs across Canada meet often to share best practices and collaborate on our activism.

Does this sound like you, or someone you know?
Contact us at gal@amnesty.ca.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Corinne de Reland, Tosha Mallette, Brandon Boyd, Kim Thorsen and Gail Clarke.





Media Award Winners

On October 19, the Amnesty International Canada Media Awards returned to an in-person event after four years of being online.

Amnesty volunteers, donors, staff and, of course, the winners and their loved ones gathered at Toronto's Gardiner Museum to celebrate the best in Canadian human rights journalism. All of the entries we received reflected a diverse cornucopia of compelling human rights stories and ways of telling them.

Host Ginella Massa and the award winners shone a light on the importance of human rights journalism to our democracy and the protection of human dignity, especially for equity-deserving groups, in Canada and around the world. Spoken-word artist and singer Coco LaRain Veira and Canadian opera legend Denise Williams gave us soaring performances that left the audience inspired and uplifted.

Congratulations to our winners! You can find them and their award-winning stories on our website.



WINNERS

Local/Alternative

"The last of the untamed: Wedzin Kwa and the Wet'suwet'en fight to save her," Brandi Morin, with photographs by Amber Bracken, Ricochet

Long-Form Audio

Ep. 1, "The death of an icon," The Kill List, Mary Lynk, Ilina Ghosh, and the team at CBC Podcasts

Mixed Media

"The complicated truth about pipelines crossing Wet'suwet'en territory," Matt Simmons, with maps by Shawn Parkinson, *The Narwhal*

National Written News

"Children of former guard at Canadian embassy in Kabul attacked in Pakistan as family waits for help from Ottawa," Janice Dickson, *The Globe and Mail*

Post-Secondary Youth

"Transforming Indigenous healthcare, one person at a time," Anne Fu, *The Queen's Journal*

Short-Form Video

"You can say 'Hockey is for everyone.' Or you can join the fight to ensure that's true," Donovan Bennett, with cinematography by David Zelikovitz, Sportsnet

1. CoCo Larain Veira
2. Denise Williams
3. Donovan Bennett and family
4. Mary Lynk, Ilina Ghosh, and the team at CBC Podcasts
5. Host Ginella Massa (right) presents the Post-Secondary Youth Award to Anne Fu

**We believe that when we work together,
our collective light is a beacon of hope.**

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