

FIGHTING TO PROTECT THEIR ANCESTRAL LANDS, AND OUR PLANET

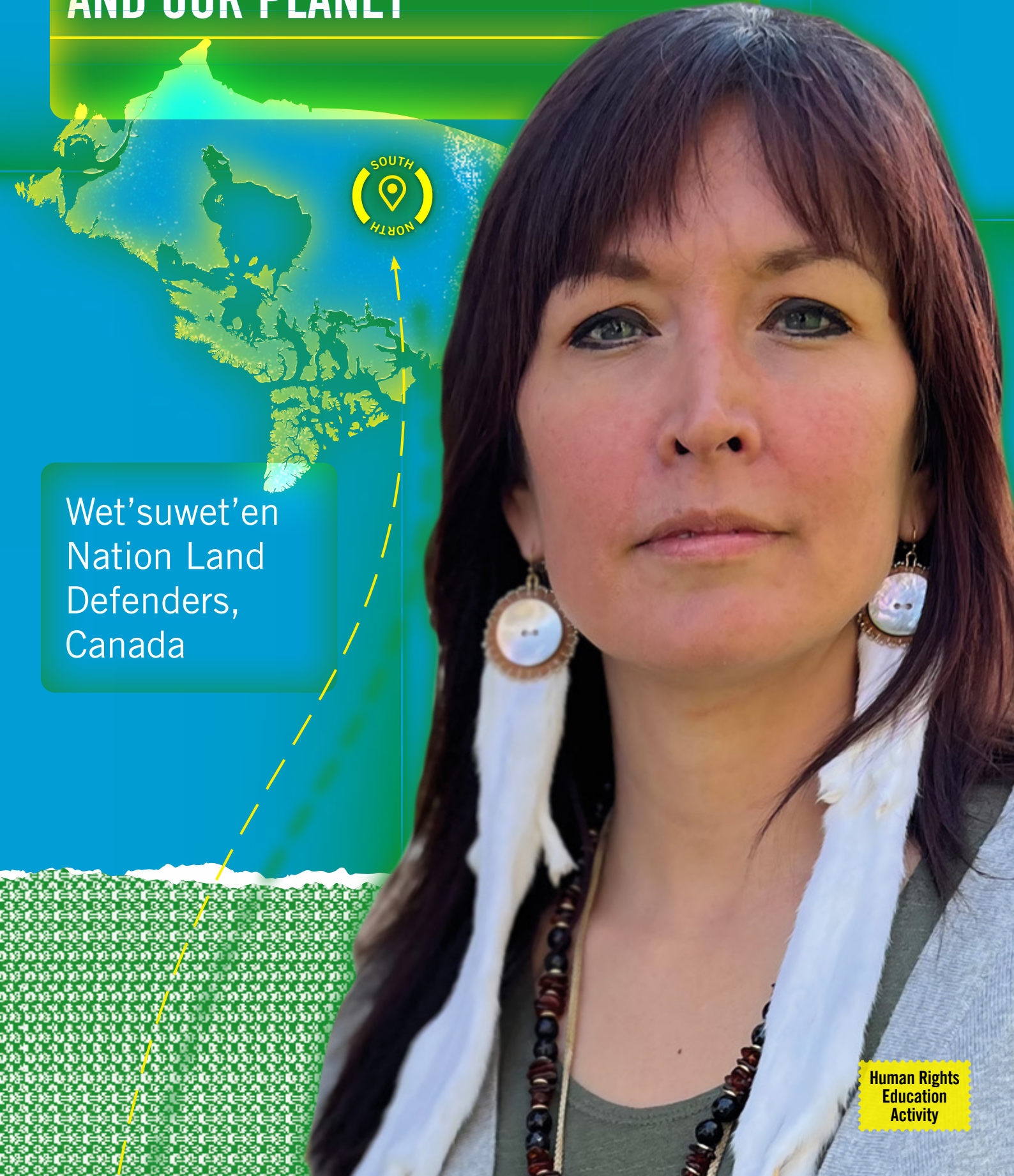
WRITE
FOR
RIGHTS

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Wet'suwet'en
Nation Land
Defenders,
Canada

Human Rights
Education
Activity



WRITE FOR RIGHTS

WRITING LETTERS CHANGES LIVES

When just a handful of people unite behind someone, the results can be amazing.

More than 20 years ago, a small group of activists in Poland ran a 24-hour letter-writing marathon. In the years that followed, the idea spread. Today, Write for Rights is the world's biggest human rights event.

From 2,326 letters in 2001 to nearly 6 million letters, tweets, petition signatures and other actions in 2023, people the world over have used the power of their words to unite behind the idea that geography is no barrier to solidarity. In 2023 alone, more than 1.4 million people were engaged through human rights education activities. Together, our actions have helped transform the lives of more than 100 people over the years, by releasing activists from detention, securing justice for those whose rights have been abused and protecting people who advocate for change.

This year's campaign once again includes people from around the world. They are connected because their human rights have been violated simply for who they are or because they exercised their rights. Together, we can fight for them to receive justice. Through Write for Rights, each of the individuals will receive personalized messages of solidarity from thousands of people across the globe. The awareness that their situations are gaining public attention offers reassurance to them and their families that they are not forgotten. And, by writing directly to the authorities to demand that they end the injustice, we can create a more just and equal world.

Individuals and groups featured in the campaign in previous years report the difference that these actions make, and often describe the strength they derive from knowing that so many people care about them.

Often, there is a noticeable change in the treatment of these individuals and others in a similar situation. Charges may be dropped and people released from detention. People are treated more humanely, and new laws or regulations addressing the injustice are introduced.

“From the bottom of my heart, this campaign has kept me alive, it's what has stopped them from killing me because they know that you are there.”

Jani Silva, environmental defender, 2021

BEFORE YOU START

This **human rights education activity** can take place in a variety of online or offline settings, such as a school classroom, a community group, a family or an activist group. As a facilitator, you can adapt the activity to best suit the context and group you are working with. For example, you may want to consider what knowledge the group already has about the issues discussed, the size of your group and how to best organize the activity to allow for active participation, the physical setting of your activity, delivering it in-person or online, and any limitations. When participants want to take action for an individual or group, discuss whether it is safe for them to do so.

The activities are all based on **participatory learning methods** in which learners are not merely presented with information; they explore, discuss, analyse and question issues relating to the individuals' stories. This methodology allows participants to:

DEVELOP key competencies and skills

FORM their own opinions, raise questions and gain a deeper understanding of the issues presented

TAKE CONTROL of their learning, and shape discussions according to their interests, abilities and concerns

HAVE THE SPACE required for them to engage emotionally and develop their own attitudes.



Letter writing with friends in Czechia for Write for Rights 2023.

© Valerie Mirić

Read about the people we're fighting for: [amnesty.org/writeforrights](https://www.amnesty.org/writeforrights)

Contact the Amnesty team in your country: [amnesty.org/countries](https://www.amnesty.org/countries)

Tweet your support to @Amnesty using the hashtag #W4R24

If you are not familiar with participatory learning methods, look at Amnesty International's **Facilitation Manual** before you start: [amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ACT35/020/2011/en/)

Amnesty International offers online human rights education courses, including a short course about human rights defenders which introduces the **Write for Rights campaign**: academy.amnesty.org/learn



YOUR WORDS ARE POWERFUL

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ACQUITTED

Rita Karasartova is a human rights defender and an expert in civic governance. For more than a decade she has dedicated her life to providing independent legal advice, helping people whose rights had been violated by a corrupt and unreliable legal system. Alongside 26 others, Rita was arrested for opposing a new border agreement giving control of a freshwater reservoir to Uzbekistan. Charged with attempting to “violently overthrow the government”, which carries a maximum sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment, Rita and at least 21 other defendants were acquitted on 14 June 2024.

“I would like to express my huge, huge gratitude... Your timely actions – these letters, petitions, signatures, and the huge number of letters that went to the court, that went to the prosecutor’s office – it was all very powerful. In fact, it was very empowering to us all... Of course, the acquittal was totally unexpected. I don’t even know how to process it in my head. We had been playing with all sorts of scenarios, different outcomes in our heads, but we didn’t think we would all be acquitted!... I thank you all.”

Rita Karasartova
from Kyrgyzstan



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“I feel so relieved, and I thank you for the amazing Write for Rights campaign. I am forever indebted. It is like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Reading all the letters and cards made me feel so loved and appreciated.”

Cecillia Chimhiri from Zimbabwe



OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS FREED

Opposition activists Cecillia Chimhiri, Joanah Mamombe and Netsai Marova were abducted, tortured and imprisoned after attending a protest in Zimbabwe. They were charged with “communicating falsehoods” and “obstructing the course of justice”. Netsai fled Zimbabwe following the attack. After being featured in Write for Rights 2022, Cecillia and Joanah were acquitted by the High Court.



Amnesty supporters in the Netherlands (far left) and Togo (left) at events for Write For Rights 2023.



ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that belong to every single one of us. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect – regardless of age, nationality, gender, race, beliefs and personal orientations.

Your rights are about being treated fairly and treating others fairly, and having the ability to make choices about your own life. These basic human rights are universal – they belong to all of us; everybody in the world. They are inalienable – they cannot be taken away from us. And they are indivisible and interdependent – they are all of equal importance and are interrelated.

Since the atrocities committed during World War II, international human rights instruments, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have provided a solid framework for national, regional and international legislation designed to improve lives around the world. Human rights can be seen as laws for governments. They create obligations for governments and state officials to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of those within their jurisdiction and also abroad.

Human rights are not luxuries to be met only when practicalities allow.



Write for Rights event in Benin in 2023.



© UN Photo

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The UDHR was drawn up by the newly formed United Nations in the years immediately following World War II. Since its adoption on 10 December 1948, it has formed the backbone of the international human rights system. Every country in the world has agreed to be bound by the general principles expressed within the 30 articles of this document.

The UDHR itself is, as its name suggests, a declaration. It is a declaration of intent by every government around the world to abide by certain standards in the treatment of individual human beings. Human rights have become part of international law: since the adoption of the UDHR, numerous other binding laws and agreements have been drawn up based on its principles. It is these laws and agreements which provide the basis for organizations like Amnesty International to call on governments to refrain from the type of behaviour or treatment that the people highlighted in our Write for Rights cases have experienced.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

 <p>Civil rights and liberties Right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, right to non-discrimination.</p>	<p>Article 1 Freedom and equality in dignity and rights</p> <p>Article 2 Non-discrimination</p> <p>Article 3 Right to life, liberty and security of person</p> <p>Article 4 Freedom from slavery</p> <p>Article 5 Freedom from torture</p>
 <p>Legal rights Right to be presumed innocent, right to a fair trial, right to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention.</p>	<p>Article 6 All are protected by the law</p> <p>Article 7 All are equal before the law</p> <p>Article 8 A remedy when rights have been violated</p> <p>Article 9 No unjust detention, imprisonment or exile</p> <p>Article 10 Right to a fair trial</p> <p>Article 11 Innocent until proven guilty</p> <p>Article 14 Right to go to another country and ask for protection</p>
 <p>Social rights Right to education, to found and maintain a family, to recreation, to health care.</p>	<p>Article 12 Privacy and the right to home and family life</p> <p>Article 13 Freedom to live and travel freely within state borders</p> <p>Article 16 Right to marry and start a family</p> <p>Article 24 Right to rest and leisure</p> <p>Article 26 Right to education, including free primary education</p>
 <p>Economic rights Right to property, to work, to housing, to a pension, to an adequate standard of living.</p>	<p>Article 15 Right to a nationality</p> <p>Article 17 Right to own property and possessions</p> <p>Article 22 Right to social security</p> <p>Article 23 Right to work for a fair wage and to join a trade union</p> <p>Article 25 Right to a standard of living adequate for your health and well-being</p>
 <p>Political rights Right to participate in the government of the country, right to vote, right to peaceful assembly, freedoms of expression, belief and religion.</p>	<p>Article 18 Freedom of belief (including religious belief)</p> <p>Article 19 Freedom of expression and the right to spread information</p> <p>Article 20 Freedom to join associations and meet with others in a peaceful way</p> <p>Article 21 Right to take part in the government of your country</p>
 <p>Cultural rights, solidarity rights Right to participate in the cultural life of the community.</p>	<p>Article 27 Right to share in your community's cultural life</p> <p>Article 28 Right to an international order where all these rights can be fully realized</p> <p>Article 29 Responsibility to respect the rights of others</p> <p>Article 30 No taking away any of these rights!</p>

ACTIVITY

RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

KEY CONCEPTS

- Indigenous Peoples' rights
- Freedom of expression and peaceful assembly
- Free, prior and informed consent
- Territory, land and environmental rights defenders

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

Participants will learn about the Wet'suwet'en Nation, an Indigenous People in Canada, and why they are protecting their lands and waters from the negative consequences of industrial development. Through their story, participants will learn how the Nation's land rights and other rights have been violated and will take action to support them.

AGE: 13+

TIME NEEDED

60 minutes – you may want additional time for the **Take Action** section.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants will:

- **understand** the importance of the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- **recognize** the implications of industrial projects on Indigenous territories.
- **feel** empathy with those whose rights are being violated and whose lands are being threatened.
- **learn** about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign.
- **write** letters in support of and showing solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en Nation.

PREPARATION

- Print the handouts and copies of the simplified UDHR for each participant/group.
- Read the background information on page 10 and the Wet'suwet'en Nation's story on page 11.

MORE INFORMATION

- Learn more about human rights including the right to freedom of expression at the Amnesty Academy: www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/online-courses/
- Read about the incompatibility of fossil fuels with human rights in Amnesty's report, *Fatal fuels*, available at www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/7382/2023/en/

MATERIALS

- **Handout: Indigenous Peoples in Canada** (page 9)
- **Handout: The Wet'suwet'en Nation's story** (page 11)
- **Background information** (page 10)
- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** simplified version (page 5)
- **Paper, pens and envelopes** (if sending letters)
- Optional: Template letters from www.amnesty.org/writeforrights/
- Optional: "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

1. OUR MEDICINES, OUR BERRIES

Write on a large sheet of paper, or read aloud:

"Our medicines, our berries, our food, the animals, our water, our culture, are all here since time immemorial. We are obligated to protect our ways of life for our babies unborn."

Invite participants to reflect on its meaning. Ask a few volunteers to share:

- **What do you think this quote is about?**
- **What does this person mean when they say "time immemorial" and "babies unborn"?**
- **Who do you think might have said this?**

Gently direct participants to the quote's connection to the environment and ancestral relationships, leading on to discussing Indigenous Peoples and their relationship to the environment. Explain that this quote is from Sleydo', a member of the Indigenous Wet'suwet'en Nation. Sleydo' lives on land that has been inhabited by her ancestors for thousands of years in a place that is known today as British Columbia in north-western Canada.

Explain that the Wet'suwet'en Nation is deeply connected to its ancestral lands and waterways, but that this connection is threatened by the construction of a fossil fuel pipeline through their territory. On their lands, the Wet'suwet'en hunt and fish to feed their



communities, pick berries and medicinal plants, and hold ceremonies. Through these activities, they pass on traditional knowledge, language and culture to future generations.

The Hereditary Chiefs, on behalf of the five clans, did not consent to the pipeline's construction. Land defenders have faced violence and been arrested and charged for blocking pipeline construction sites, even though these sites are on their ancestral lands. They could face time in prison and a criminal record if they are found guilty.

2. THE STORY OF THE WET'SUWET'EN NATION



Distribute copies of the Wet'suwet'en Nation's story (page 11) and give participants a few minutes to read the story.

In plenary, ask a few volunteers to briefly share:

- **What shocks or surprises you about the story of Sleydo'?**
- **Why do you think the police are arresting Indigenous Peoples?**
- **Whose interests do you think are being protected by the police and by the government? Those of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, or those of the pipeline company?**
- **How do you think the pipeline construction affects the Wet'suwet'en Nation?**

3. EFFECTS ON INDIGENOUS RIGHTS INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT



Divide participants into small groups and provide them with copies of the simplified version of the UDHR from page 5 and the handout on Indigenous Peoples from page 9.

Explain that industrial projects, including fossil fuels infrastructure such as pipelines, can have significant negative effects on the environment and the people living in those areas. Invite participants to imagine that they will soon travel to the Wet'suwet'en Nation to conduct an environmental and human rights impact assessment.

Which environmental and other rights do they think may be at risk, and would they suggest need investigating? Possible answers can include impacts related to water quality, wildlife, plant life, soil integrity, pollution, habitat destruction, changes in land use and changes in the Nation's way of life and cultural practices. What about their right to decide what happens on their territory? You may also remind participants that fossil fuels are driving the climate crisis.

Ask each group to identify what human rights the Wet'suwet'en Nation has, and which of these rights they think might be at risk or might have been violated. They could do this by making a drawing of before and after the installation of the pipeline, for example.

Possible answers may include the rights to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, water, health, cultural heritage, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, the right to consultation, and Indigenous Peoples' rights including self-determination and the right to free, prior and informed consent.

Ask the groups to briefly report back in plenary. In closing, refer to relevant articles from the UDHR, emphasizing the connection between the right to self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the right to health and other human rights. If there is still time, debrief using the following questions:

- **Why is it important for the Wet'suwet'en Nation to have the right to decide what happens on their ancestral territory?**
- **How does the construction of the pipeline violate their rights?**
- **What can be done to support Sleydo' and the Wet'suwet'en Nation in their struggle?**

If this is the first time that participants are introduced to the UDHR, you should focus on building a shared understanding of what it is first, using the information starting on page 4.

4. TAKE ACTION



Explain about Amnesty International's Write for Rights campaign. Explain that Amnesty International is encouraging people to demand justice for the Wet'suwet'en Nation. You can give examples from last year's campaign (page 3) demonstrating how successful writing letters and taking other actions can be, or watch the "Write for Rights: Take action" video from www.amnesty.org/w4r-videos

If there isn't enough time for participants to take action within the time allowed, encourage them to organize how to do so afterwards or divide the actions among the groups. Encourage them to be creative.

WRITE A LETTER

Encourage participants to write to the Premier of British Columbia using the contact information on the right.

- Tell the premier something about yourself to make this a personal letter.
- Tell them what shocks you about the story of the Wet'suwet'en Nation.
- Tell them why you think it is important that governments respect and uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Urge the premier to **stop the criminalization of Wet'suwet'en and other Indigenous land defenders.**

Premier of British Columbia

PO box 9041
STN Prov. Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E1
Canada

Email: premier@gov.bc.ca

Facebook: www.facebook.com/bcndp/

X: @bcndp

Instagram: @bcndp

Hashtags: #WetsuwetenStrong
#AllOutforWedzinkwa #W4R24

Salutation: Dear Premier

SHOW SOLIDARITY

Send your messages of support to show the Wet'suwet'en Nation land defenders that you support them in their fight to protect their ancestral lands and waterways. You could send drawings or postcards of your favourite places in nature or the place where you live.

Suggested messages:

Thank you for protecting our Earth!

Indigenous rights are human rights. We are with you!

I stand in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en land defenders!

Wet'suwet'en Nation

c/o Amnesty International Canada
312 Laurier Avenue East
Ottawa ON K1N 1H9
Canada

X: @Gidimten

Instagram: @yintah_access

Hashtags: #WetsuwetenStrong
#AllOutforWedzinkwa #W4R24

Website: yintahaccess.com



HANDOUT

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA

Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, are the original inhabitants of Canada. These diverse Peoples have lived on their ancestral lands for thousands of years, maintaining a deep connection to the land, water and natural resources. The Wet'suwet'en Nation is one such Indigenous Nation, with a rich cultural heritage that is intricately linked with their ancestral territories and waterways in what is now British Columbia. These lands and waters are integral to their identity, culture and way of life.

The Wet'suwet'en territory is "unceded". In the Canadian context, unceded lands or territory means lands or territory that Indigenous Peoples have never given up, surrendered or legally signed away to Canada, which was colonized by Great Britain. The Wet'suwet'en have never signed a treaty agreement with the Canadian government. The Government of British Columbia has also recognized the Wet'suwet'en as the ancestral authorities of their traditional territory.

KEY CONCEPTS

Indigenous rights: Indigenous rights refers to the collective and individual human rights of Indigenous Peoples. These rights are enshrined in international instruments such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Key aspects include the right to self-determination, the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social, and cultural institutions, and the right to the lands, territories and resources that they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used.

Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC): FPIC is based on the rights to self-determination, self-governance and freedom from racial discrimination. It means that Indigenous Peoples have the right to be consulted with and to give or withhold their consent in all cases where their rights may be significantly affected, for example a project that may affect their lands and natural resources. This consent must be given freely, without coercion, prior to any commencement of activities and throughout the project when significant changes are planned, and with full information about the project and its potential impacts.

Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment: in 2022, after years of campaigning by civil society organizations, Indigenous Peoples and frontline communities, the UN General Assembly recognized the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. It is essential to the enjoyment of a range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food and water.

Molly Wickham, also known as Sleydo', of the Wet'suwet'en Nation.





BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AND GOVERNMENT DUTIES IN THE CONTEXT OF BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

All companies have a responsibility to **respect** human rights and the environment. This includes:

- Conducting thorough and ongoing environmental and human rights due diligence.
- Engaging in meaningful consultation with and providing accessible information to affected communities, especially Indigenous Peoples.
- Obtaining free, prior and informed consent from Indigenous Peoples before proceeding with projects.
- Mitigating negative impacts on the environment and human rights.
- Providing transparent information about the project and its potential impacts.
- Providing effective remedy to people whose rights have been harmed. This includes a guarantee of non-repetition.

Governments have a duty to **protect** the rights of Indigenous Peoples and **ensure** that corporate activities do not harm the environment or violate human rights. This includes:

- Upholding free, prior and informed consent and ensuring that Indigenous Peoples are meaningfully consulted and that their decision is respected and upheld by states and corporations.
- Enforcing environmental protection laws and regulations.
- Monitoring and regulating the activities of companies to prevent environmental degradation and human rights abuses.
- Providing legal and institutional support to Indigenous Peoples to defend their rights and territories.



THE WET'SUWET'EN NATION'S STORY

“Our medicines, our berries, our food, the animals, our water, our culture, are all here since time immemorial. We are obligated to protect our ways of life for our babies unborn.” These are the words of Sleydo', a member of the Indigenous Wet'suwet'en Nation, who lives on land inhabited by her ancestors for thousands of years.

In 2019, Coastal GasLink Pipeline Ltd (CGL) began constructing a fossil fuel pipeline through the Wet'suwet'en Nation's ancestral territory, without the consent of the Hereditary Chiefs and their clans. They never agreed to the pipeline and the Nation has the right to decide what development takes place on its territory.

Committed to protecting their ancestral lands and everyone's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, Sleydo' and other land defenders began taking action to stop the pipeline construction. But their peaceful actions have been met with intimidation, harassment and criminalization.

In 2018, the British Columbia Supreme Court (BCSC) granted CGL an injunction to prevent any interference with pipeline construction. The police have enforced this injunction with four violent raids on Wet'suwet'en territory, using weapons, helicopters and dogs. More than 75 land defenders have been arrested.

In November 2021, Sleydo' was arrested during one of these raids. Along with two other defenders, she was later found guilty of “criminal contempt” for allegedly disobeying the injunction order to stay away from pipeline construction sites, despite them being on her ancestral territory. The land defenders have made an application to the BCSC stating that their human rights were violated by police during the raids. Their future depends on the outcome of the application. If unsuccessful, they face prison.



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© Amnesty International (Photo: Alli McCracken)



© Gidimt'en Access Point YouTube Channel

Top: Molly Wickham, also known as Sleydo'.

Middle: Wet'suwet'en territory.

Bottom: Police confronting Wet'suwet'en Nation land defenders.

ABOUT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a movement of 10 million people which mobilizes the humanity in everyone and campaigns for change so we can all enjoy our human rights. Our vision is of a world where those in power keep their promises, respect international law and are held to account. We investigate and expose the facts, whenever and wherever abuses happen. We lobby governments as well as other powerful groups such as companies, making sure they keep their promises and respect international law. By telling the powerful stories of the people we work with, we mobilize millions of supporters around the world to campaign for change and to stand in the defence of activists on the frontline. We support people to claim their rights through education and training.

Our work protects and empowers people – from abolishing the death penalty to advancing sexual and reproductive rights, and from combating discrimination to defending refugees' and migrants' rights. We help to bring torturers to justice, change oppressive laws, and free people who have been jailed just for voicing their opinion. We speak out for anyone and everyone whose freedom or dignity are under threat.

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First published in 2024
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House,
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

September 2024
Index: **POL 32/8285/2024**
Original language: **English**

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