

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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News Release

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UBCIC Strongly Condemns Punitive Sentencing and Criminalization of Tsleil-Waututh Land Defender Will George

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – May 11, 2022) The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) has learned of the BC Supreme Court's sentencing of Tsleil-Waututh Nation land defender Will George to 28 days of incarceration for contempt of court. UBCIC condemns the application of such a sentence in the strongest possible terms. The injunction granted to Trans Mountain Pipeline ULC (Trans Mountain) concerns areas which the Tsleil-Waututh Nation has never ceded, released, or surrendered to the Crown, and activities that the Nation has not provided their free, prior, and informed consent for Trans Mountain to carry out within their territory.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President, stated, "Clearly, the so-called Canadian justice system continues its racist persecution of Indigenous Peoples who seek to protect their homelands from the destructive predations of Industry. UBCIC has repeatedly urged all orders of government and the courts to uphold the minimum human rights standards of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. We have not been fighting for a limited recognition of our rights that vanishes the moment our peoples become an obstacle to business-as-usual." He continued, "By UBCIC Resolution 2022-12, *Ending the Criminalization and Human Rights Violations of Indigenous Land Defenders*, the UBCIC Chiefs Council condemns the criminalization of Indigenous peoples asserting their rights and the intimidation, harassment, and forceful land dispossession that constitute a breach of international human rights standards and the *UN Declaration*."

"Will George is being sent to jail simply to deter others from asserting their inherent rights as Indigenous peoples," said Chief Don Tom, UBCIC Vice President. "Incarceration is being used here as a tool to spread fear, not as a last resort to keep communities safe. The widespread criminalization of Indigenous land defenders, who are asserting their rights to protect their land from the risks of unsafe infrastructure development and the escalating impacts of the climate crisis,

is of critical concern for everyone in Canada. The sentencing overlooked arguments from defence counsel for why Will George should be sentenced to community service hours and probation rather than incarcerated.”

“The Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination wrote to Canada’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations just days ago, calling on Canada to cease the construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline until the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples along the route can be obtained,” said Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, UBCIC Secretary-Treasurer. “Indigenous peoples’ rights to make decisions on their own unceded territories have been continually supplanted by the colonial Doctrine of Discovery by which the courts assert jurisdiction over unceded Tsleil-Waututh territory, and every other territory crossed by the Trans Mountain corridor.”

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UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

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