

OPEN LETTER to Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada;
Deputy Commissioner Jennifer Strachan, Royal Canadian Mounted Police

August 7, 2021

We write to share our joint concerns with the Canadian federal government, Trans Mountain Corporation, and RCMP over the recent invasion of the Tiny House Warriors' Blue River camp on July 23, 2021, and the installation of intrusive 24/7 surveillance technology. This compounds our ongoing concerns for their human rights and safety.

On July 23rd, 2021, between 5:00 and 5:30 a.m., approximately 50 people who we believe to be Trans Mountain Corporation workers or contractors and private security personnel descended on the Tiny House Warriors village site near Blue River, BC. They dismantled THW security barricades that control access to the camp, including an installation of red dresses drawing attention to the epidemic of missing and murdered women and girls. In its place, they erected their own steel fences and concrete barriers, effectively blocking THW's access to the road, to their main source of water (Blue River), and to the bushes used to gather berries--an Aboriginal right protected under section 35 of the Constitution of Canada.

They posted no trespassing signs and warning signs referring to a sweeping injunction that looms over the entire proposed Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion project. They also installed remote-operated surveillance towers, in one case metres from sleeping quarters, arrayed with floodlights, loudspeakers, sensors and cameras.

We anticipate this to be one of the first steps in a move to escalate surveillance of the Tiny House Warriors and ramp up construction of a proposed industrial camp to house 550 temporary pipeline workers (sometimes referred to as a 'man camp'). In a July 27th presentation before the Village of Valemont Council Meeting, Trans Mountain confirmed that between July 23rd and July 25th, the area was "completely fenced and secured" for the purposes of the industrial camp, and that they are proceeding with their Oil and Gas Commission notification to begin work. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls notes that such camps [drastically increase the risks of sexual assault](#), domestic violence and intimidation against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people. In Canada and internationally, Secwepmec land defenders have [urgently raised concerns](#) about sexual assault, violence and substance abuse associated with these camps and their opposition to them on their territory.

The [Tiny House Warriors](#) (THW) are a group of Indigenous women, families, and land defenders who are upholding collective sovereignty and jurisdiction in opposition to the ongoing expansion of the Trans Mountain Pipeline (TMX) through unceded Secwepmec territory in interior BC. The camp near Blue River is one of two camps where the THW have reclaimed "Crown" lands to assert their collective and territorial authority in opposition to the pipeline and the construction of associated work camps. Indigenous land and human rights defenders have maintained a full-time presence there since July 2018. In this time, it has grown to be a thriving community--a site where Secwepmec culture, rights, and sustainable

land-based economies flourish. The actions of TMX on July 23 constitute an invasion of this community and breach of Indigenous rights.

Targeting Indigenous people on their own land with intrusive, round-the-clock monitoring and remote multi-spectrum surveillance technology could represent a serious violation of privacy, civil liberties, human rights and Indigenous rights. We are concerned by the growing use of these enforcement techniques by private security companies, the potential sharing of surveillance data with policing services, and the implications for Indigenous groups and civil society at large.

Injunction monitoring and enforcement on the Trans Mountain project has largely been taken out of the hands of police by private security. The towers installed opposite the THW camp appear to take this a step further, using remote-operated cameras and automated sensors. It is unclear to what extent human operators are involved in monitoring or evidence collection. It is unclear who owns the towers, where recordings are kept or how long they are stored. It is unclear what sensor technologies are in use, or how far they project beyond the injunction zone.

Photographs of the towers show they have an independent power supply, including batteries powered by solar panels and likely a fuel cell generator as backup, which is common on these kinds of installations. The towers include a pneumatic mast, two-way transmission antennas, a robotic pan/tilt/zoom camera, LED floodlights and loudspeakers. They also include fixed sensors which commonly house a variety of technologies including motion detection, night vision cameras and thermal imaging cameras. It is unclear which of these capabilities is included in the Blue River towers, their effective range or what information they are gathering.

The THW have long been the target of ongoing surveillance, profiling, and criminalization by the RCMP, their Community-Industry Response Group, and private security firms. Access to information requests have confirmed extensive surveillance of the THW by Trans Mountain Corp. and their securities contractors. The THW have applied to have additional, unredacted surveillance records released, which is under court review. Further, RCMP intelligence documents framing Indigenous land defenders as “un-Canadian” and threat to Canada’s “national interest,” reveal systemic racial profiling within the RCMP.

Meanwhile members of the THW have been repeatedly targeted by RCMP. A total of 15 arrests have been made, including the violent arrest of Kanahus Manuel on October 19, 2019, in which RCMP slammed Manuel to the ground, breaking her wrist. She did not receive adequate treatment for her injuries until 10 hours after her arrest, when she was transported to hospital by ambulance. A lawsuit is currently being sought against the arresting officer.

The THW have also faced ongoing harassment and violence since their establishment. During an incident on April 19, 2020, three men and one woman perpetrated a [violent attack](#) on the camp, commandeering a truck and ramming it into the barricades and into a tiny home where people were taking shelter. The investigation into this incident is still ongoing; though individuals were identified, no arrests have been made.

The Tiny House Warriors have documented their harassment and criminalization and reported on it before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) on two occasions. In December 2019, [CERD issued a decision](#) calling upon Canada to “immediately cease construction of the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion project and cancel all permits, until free, prior and informed consent is obtained from all the Secwepemc people.” In the decision, the Committee reported that it was:

“Disturbed by forced removal, disproportionate use of force, harassment and intimidation by law enforcement officials against indigenous peoples who peacefully oppose large-scale development projects on their traditional territories;

Alarmed by escalating threat of violence against indigenous peoples, such as the reported violent arrest and detainment of a Secwepemc defender against the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion project, on 19th October 2019”

It urged Canada to “immediately cease forced eviction” of the Secwepemc peoples, and to guarantee that “the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and associated security and policing services will be withdrawn from their traditional lands.” In [November 2020, CERD again called on Canada](#) to respond to this decision. To date, Canada has provided no information on measures taken to address the concerns raised by the UN Committee.

We are deeply concerned about the escalation of intimidation and surveillance of land defenders at the THW camp and in particular the many gender-based threats and acts of violence they have experienced both online and in person. We urge you to heed the decision of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and immediately suspend permits and halt construction until the Secwepemc people give their free, prior and informed consent to the pipeline expansion, and to remove associated security and surveillance technologies from Secwepemc lands. The BC government and Canada’s obligations under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, implemented provincially through the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, as well as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders are clearly at stake.

This letter is to affirm our unanimous support for the Tiny House Warriors as well as to express the deepest concern we feel for their safety, civil rights, Indigenous rights, and human rights. We will continue to monitor the situation, and will be watching closely to see how Trans Mountain Corp., its securities contractors, and RCMP conduct themselves in the coming weeks and months.

Signed,

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Stephen Lewis, Humanitarian, Former UN ambassador

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, Union of BC Indian Chiefs

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Linda Black Elk, Food Sovereignty Skills Director, United Tribes Technical College

Rita Wong, writer and Associate Professor, Emily Carr University of Art and Design

Pamela Palmater, Mi'kmaq, Chair in Indigenous Governance, Ryerson University

Christi Belcourt, Métis artist

Alexandra Morton, independent biologist

Peter McCartney, Climate Campaigner, Wilderness Committee

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