

OPEN LETTER: Call for the Halting of Site C Construction Due to the COVID-19 Outbreak

Posted by Joan Russow

Monday, 30 March 2020 06:29 - Last Updated Tuesday, 05 May 2020 22:13

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Premier of Executive Council Honourable Adrian Dix Minister of Health

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Dear Premier Horgan and Minister Dix:

We are writing to request that immediate action be taken to compel BC Hydro to halt all construction at Site C Dam due to the risk COVID-19 now poses to vulnerable workers and nearby Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in northeast B.C.

Through UBCIC Resolution 2011-25, UBCIC highlighted the environmental dangers of the Site C Dam and pointed to the devastating effects it will have on the Treaty and Aboriginal Rights of Treaty 8 First Nations. UBCIC now calls upon the Province to recognize that the transmission of COVID-19 amongst workers is an urgent and pressing concern. BC Hydro has confirmed that 16 of its construction workers at the Site C Dam site are under self-isolation with flu like symptoms. Given the close quarters and inevitable contact points at the 1,600-worker camp, an outbreak of COVID-19 would be disastrous and with dire implications for nearby communities, including First Nation communities. We are informed that there is an extreme shortage of health services in northeast British Columbia, with virtually no hospital beds available to handle an outbreak in Fort St. John or nearby Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

The time for intervention is now. BC Hydro's recent news release also reveals that it is barreling ahead with Site C Dam construction, including work on river diversion, transmission lines, highway realignment, clearing and other elements. This negligence and irresponsible continuation of construction places the welfare of workers and communities at an unacceptable risk and is utterly inconsistent with the health advice provided by Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry.

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We look forward to your timely response.

On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip & President