

Do the right thing, Canada

By Laura Campbell

This past weekend, our Prime Minister was in Ethiopia, bolstering the diplomatic campaign to gain African votes in the Canadian bid for a UN Security Council seat.

On the very same weekend in Northern BC, the RCMP entered the Unist'ot'en Territory and arrested indigenous land defenders (among them, matriarchs like Freda Huson) in their attempt to enforce Coastal Gaslink's injunction to access traditional Wet'suwet'en land. (Coastal Gas link is a natural gas pipeline mega-project being built for resource export purposes).

At the time of the arrests, the female elders were hosting a ceremony to honour the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

It is crucial to note that it was decided in a Supreme Court case in 1997 (Delgamuukw) that the Wet'suwet'en people have full title over their land. Essentially, they are a fully sovereign nation.

Critics will say that these two events this weekend are seemingly completely contradictory. We can't honour basic UN frameworks (in this case, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), and yet want to take up a leadership position at the organization itself.

But actually, the contradiction makes sense. It is pretty much par for the course that states on the Security Council routinely violate and abuse the organization for their own benefit (Russia, the United States, and China, in particular). So perhaps it is exactly fitting that Canada seeks such a position in light of our attempt to become a resource-extracting superpower. (This is very much about resources, as our chief competitor for the seat is Norway).

Indeed, since the mid-1950s, with the rise of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War, it has been the General Assembly that has championed progressive global politics: anti-colonialism, environmental protection, and indigenous land claims, only to be blocked by the Security Council veto power.

And yet the Liberals have been adamant that reconciliation with indigenous peoples was central to their mandate. The Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women was at the heart of this effort. And the final conclusion of the inquiry left our government wringing their hands: the violence against indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ people amounts to genocide.

This genocide has deep roots, pre-dating Confederation of course, but is also fueled by policies of the 20th and 21st century (for instance, the presence of oil and gas work camps in the north has been cited as fuelling violence and disappearances; studies have shown this to be true for decades).

We've just consistently gotten it wrong. And all efforts to do better are mostly falling short; yet, this government believes Canada can act as a bastion of human rights (and lucrative trade deals) across the world. And I do believe that, on some level, Canada must take up a new kind of leadership ? but we've got to practice what we preach.

The continued violation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is unacceptable. Canadians from coast to coast are appalled at what is happening at Unist'ot'en camp, and they want the world to know.

The second, equally galling connection between our diplomacy for the UN security council seat and the Unist'ot'en raid this past weekend was that we can't of course lead on climate change if we continue to expand oil and gas.

But again, the Security Council seat doesn't necessarily require the kind of credibility on climate change that it should. The United

States withdrew from the Paris Accord after all.

So is that it? Are we giving up? Every single scientist has told us that we need to transition away from fossil fuels NOW. That we must, in no uncertain terms, stick to our tight carbon budgets. (Those budgets don't include new oil and gas infrastructure).

How can our federal government provide leadership on the climate change front when we can't even lead our provinces in this regard?

To be sure, tensions are high. But there is no magical button that will make the emissions from these projects go away. There is also no magical button that will make Canadian bitumen profitable when the price of West Texas Intermediate is at \$53 a barrel.

The last time it made economic sense to export our oil was in 2014. The hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en have stood their ground. And they will continue to do so ? and I support them fully. The one thing that Premier Jason Kenney has been right about is that this is only the beginning.

Figuring out what kind of Canada we are going to become in the 21st century really starts now. Do we honour our commitment to reconciliation and lead on the climate crisis? Or do we prop up a volatile industry?

The path we choose will define what kind of global leadership Canada truly wants to embrace. It's never too late to do the right thing.