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Dear Prime Minister Trudeau;

We are writing to you in advance of the General Election. We ask if you will commit to resolving the issue of clean drinking water for Indigenous communities in Canada. Is clean drinking water for Indigenous peoples a priority for your government, or for your party?

As Indigenous people, and as allies to Indigenous people, this issue is important to us, especially in this era of Truth and Reconciliation. We are looking for concrete action on this issue and we implore you to act. It is unconscionable to continue to talk about Truth and Reconciliation while Canada continues to ignore the basic human rights of Indigenous peoples.

The lack of clean, safe drinking water in First Nations is one of the greatest violations of the UN-recognized human right to water and sanitation. In September 2015, Canada committed to achieving the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes the goal of clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), specifically to "ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" by 2030.

In 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised to lift all long-term boil water advisories on First Nation reserves (Indian Reserves) by 2021, yet there are still long-term drinking water advisories in 2024. It was the Indian Act of 1876 that created Indian Reserves, and it is the Indian Act that states the Canadian government has authority to regulate Indian Reserves. The Government of Canada is derelict in its fiduciary duty to make provisions for the health of Indigenous peoples. The lack of support for basic human rights for Indigenous peoples living on First Nation reserves has been pervasive through successive governments, for decades.

Since 1990 Canada has had four majority governments, and five minority governments. There seems to be a lack of political will to resolve this basic issue. Does your party have the courage and conviction to act on this matter?

In 2021, the Auditor General found that Indigenous Services Canada did not provide the support necessary to ensure that First Nations communities have ongoing access to safe drinking water. Drinking water advisories remain an ongoing concern for many communities, with almost half of the existing water advisories being in place for more than a decade. [Report 3—Access to Safe Drinking Water in First Nations Communities—Indigenous Services Canada \(oag-bvg.gc.ca\)](#)

Sending plastic water bottles to First Nations is a disgraceful response to this crisis, creates unnecessary wasteful use of plastic and is counterproductive in the fight against climate change.

According to the Council of Canadians...

There are still 26 long term drinking water advisories on reserves including some that have been in place for more than 25 years. There is also a deficit in funding for the maintenance and operation of drinking water systems on reserves, which the Parliamentary Budget Officer identified as amounting to \$138 million per year.

As reported by the University of Calgary...

Examples of First Nations across Canada enduring persistent drinking water issues are endless. Neskantaga First Nation in Northern Ontario has been on a long-term boil water advisory since 1995. Semiahmoo First Nation recently had a 16-year boil water advisory lifted, after connecting to the nearby Metro Vancouver water line through the city of Surrey, B.C. The community is only a five-minute drive from the city of White Rock.

In *Clean Water, Broken Promises*, an extensive report from Concordia University's Institute of Investigative Journalism, this issue is highlighted as a matter that is important to not only Indigenous peoples, but to all Canadians.

The Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal peoples notes that several of the issues surrounding drinking water quality on-reserve have been the result of economic development and other activities that have polluted the source water surrounding First Nations communities. Many northern communities, for example, experience high levels of diesel contamination; buried military equipment has resulted in elevated levels of PCBs in nearby water systems.

By way of contrast with the lack of basic services on First Nation reserves, the Government of Canada has just announced \$6.1 million To Frontier Lithium Inc. for mine access road and power transmission line infrastructure projects. - <https://www.juniorminingnetwork.com/junior-miner-news/press-releases/2003-tsx-venture/fl/168303-frontier-unlocks-conditional-6-1m-in-federal-funding-for-critical-minerals-infrastructure-projects.html>

Contaminated Drinking Water is a Symptom of a Much Larger Problem: Jurisdiction

The United Nations 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services is a collaboration which has produced “.... an unprecedented collection of evidence, integrating natural and social science perspectives, a range of knowledge systems and multiple dimensions of value. This is the first global-level assessment to systematically consider evidence about the contributions of Indigenous and local Knowledge and practices to the enhancement and

maintenance of wild and domesticated biodiversity and landscapes.” https://files.ipbes.net/ipbes-web-prod-public-files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf, p5.)

The UN 2019 Global Assessment report documents the causes and impact of decline in ecosystem health and notes, “*Areas of the world projected to experience significant negative effects from global changes in climate, biodiversity, ecosystem functions and nature’s contributions to people are also home to large concentrations of indigenous peoples and many of the world’s poorest communities. Because of their strong dependency on nature and its contributions for subsistence, livelihoods and health, those communities will be disproportionately hard-hit by those negative changes.*” - (https://files.ipbes.net/ipbes-web-prod-public-files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf, p17)

Boil Water Advisories are not an isolated problem but a symptom of the declining health of ecosystems resulting from unsustainable resource extraction practices. - https://files.ipbes.net/ipbes-web-prod-public-files/2020-02/ipbes_global_assessment_report_summary_for_policymakers_en.pdf

The trend shows that 75% of the land-based environment and about 66% of the marine environment have been significantly altered by human actions. On average, these trends have been less severe—or avoided—in areas held or managed by Indigenous peoples. (*Emphasis added*)

Monica Dean, “Key Findings to Know from the IPBES Report on Biodiversity”, United Nations Foundation, May 6, 2019 - <https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/key-findings-to-know-from-the-ipbes-report-on-diversity/>

“The notion of a good life that most Indigenous peoples share is deeply relational: the relation to the land with all its interconnected human and nonhuman inhabitants constitutes their (sic) collective self-understanding of community. Livelihoods sovereignty is an essential condition to keep this bond.” (kai, M.A. et al, “Unedited Draft Chapter 31” (Bonn, Germany: IPBES, 2019), 74 -

https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/ipbes_global_assessment_chapter_5_unedited_31may.pdf)

In the Canadian context, this highlights the failure of Canadian socio-economic and political systems to facilitate Indigenous management and stewardship over the ecosystems of the watersheds in which the Indigenous communities live and rely upon for drinking water. Indigenous peoples have demonstrated a level of stewardship and ecological management of ecosystems that is best in class. In Canada, we need to ensure that Indigenous communities have the resources, the funding, and recognition of their sovereignty and jurisdictions to manage their watersheds, the ecosystems and water systems. This isn’t just about funding. It is about land management and incorporating Indigenous knowledge and experience and respecting inherent rights of self-government.

What is required is more than project-based water treatment installations but systemic change for secure, long-term funding of infrastructure. This has been a well-documented and supported

argument by the Assembly of First Nations since 2011 in their Submission to the Standing Committee on Finances. -

https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/411/FINA/WebDoc/WD5138047/411_FINA_PBC2011_Briefs/Assembly%20of%20First%20Nations%20E.html

First Nations, as the original people of Canada, warrant the resources, finances and regulatory powers to manage their water systems. The current system provides for capital investment sporadically to some but not all Indigenous communities and then fails to provide adequate training, money and resources for management and maintenance of systems.

Most importantly, Indigenous Peoples must have their jurisdiction and sovereignty acknowledged and their rights to stewardship entrenched in legislation. Canada must support Indigenous capacity to meaningfully participate as a full partner in decision-making with respect to resource extraction relating to forests, minerals, mining and oil and gas extraction and transportation. Too often, long-term boil water advisories for Indigenous communities are in localities with extensive mining, paper mill or other resource extraction, such as near the Ring of Fire in northern Ontario near Neskutango and the mercury contamination at Grassy Narrows.

We ask for your commitment to address these key issues of access to clean drinking water and federal recognition of Indigenous jurisdictions and sovereignty. Does your party have the courage and conviction to act on this matter? Does your party have the integrity to do what is right? We look forward to your response.

Yours truly,

on behalf of Indigenous Action Canada

Lorraine Rekmans

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Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois

Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada

Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada

Maxime Bernier, Leader of the People's Party of Canada

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada

Pierre Poilievre, Leader of the Conservative Party of Canada