



Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Wynne:

Our organizations – human rights organizations, environmental groups, faith communities and citizens' movements – stand with the people of Asubpeeschoseewagong (Grassy Narrows First Nation) in calling on the federal and provincial governments to take immediate action to ensure that those who are suffering from the devastating health impacts of the poisoning of the English and Wabigoon river system will at long last have guaranteed access to the long-term, specialized health care they need within their community.

Ontario's decision to allow an upstream pulp mill to release mercury into the river system in the 1960s undermined the economy and way of life of the Anishnaabe people of Grassy Narrows and left a legacy of generation after generation of chronic and debilitating illness. While both levels of government have long denied that there was any cause for ongoing concern over the mercury contamination of the English and Wabigoon River system, it has now been revealed that government officials have actually known for decades both that there is credible and compelling evidence of Minamata disease at Grassy Narrows and that there is a clear risk of ongoing contamination of their waters from contaminated soil and groundwater that remains under the mill to this day.

While withholding this crucial information from the people of Grassy Narrows, and wrongly denying the legitimacy of their concerns, governments in Canada have denied them the essential means to mitigate and treat the terrible impacts of this environmental and human health catastrophe.

Our organizations have each had the opportunity to work alongside members of the Grassy Narrows community. We have seen for ourselves the devastating impact of mercury contamination on their lives and on the well-being and cultural integrity of their community. We are shocked and angered that this suffering and loss has been needlessly prolonged by withholding vital information and denying known facts about threats to their health.

As you are aware, access to health care is a basic human right. Everyone in Canada should be guaranteed access to the highest available quality of care – without discrimination. In the case of the people of Grassy Narrows, the federal and provincial obligation to ensure appropriate, quality, and accessible care is further deepened by the original public responsibility for contamination of their river system and the need to redress the long refusal to address the continued threats to their health and well-being.

Our organizations welcome the fact that Ontario is at long last funding measures to mitigate the existing mercury contamination of river system. However, these measures alone are not sufficient. The federal and provincial governments must now act to minimize further the suffering and harm of those whose health and well-being has been compromised by the poisoning of their waters.



The people of Grassy Narrows have called for the creation and long term dedicated funding of a specialized Minamata disease treatment facility within their community to provide appropriate care for all ages of persons suffering from mercury poisoning, at any stage of the illness. Our organizations fully support this call as an essential means to uphold their right to health and to reduce the loss of culture and community cohesion resulting from individuals having to leave the community for care.

There should be no delay in meeting this urgent need.

Alex Neve, Amnesty International Canada

Stephen Cornish, David Suzuki Foundation

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