



PRESS RELEASE

Beaver Lake Cree Nation denounces belittling comments by author Levant; Chief and the Cree Nation remain firm in stand against tar sands expansion

For release November 30, 2010

Lac La Biche, Alberta – Beaver Lake Cree Nation Chief Alphonse Lameman expressed his disappointment and sadness at hearing of negative and belittling comments made by Calgary lawyer and author Ezra Levant at a recent public debate hosted by the Wilderness Committee in Vancouver, BC on November 18, 2010.

In an exchange about the impact of tar sands development on First Nations in the region, Mr. Levant made several disparaging and insulting comments directed at Chief Lameman and at First Nations people generally.

Levant stated, “Chief Al Lameman wears a suit to work just like you and me except for when the Co-op Bank from the United Kingdom comes in. Once a year they come in and give him a cheque for a quarter of a million bucks, and in return Chief Al Lameman has to put on his feathered headdress and go to London dressed like a cartoon Indian and shake his moneymaker for all the Fleet Street press.” Mr. Levant went on to say that because of tar sands employment “many thousands of aboriginals have found for the first time ever a way to earn their way up instead of being on their back begging.”

“Mr. Levant’s words are ugly and mean-spirited and add nothing to the tar sands conversation in Canada,” said Chief Lameman. “He takes the level of discussion on important issues like the destruction of the boreal forest by tar sands to a new low, denigrating the importance of our beliefs and the stand we have taken as stewards of our traditional lands. His negative and sweeping comments on First Nations people are, unfortunately, the sad expression of an attitude we deal with every day. Mr. Levant paints himself as a great defender of rights like freedom of speech, while telling us that we should not defend our own rights.”

Chief Lameman said his traditional headdress is worn for many solemn and important occasions. “Protection of the lands and resources is an important issue,” said the Chief. “The defense of our treaty rights is an important issue. The fact that a foreign financial institution has had to come to our aid when Alberta and Canada are taking every legal step possible to prevent the protection of our rights is an important issue.”

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Beaver Lake Cree Nation launched its legal action in May 2008, challenging the cumulative impacts of the proposed tar sands expansion because they risk destroying guaranteed treaty rights to hunt, fish, trap and gather. This type of legal action will take many years and several million dollars to complete. Very little financial support has been forthcoming in Canada; however, the issue has garnered more attention and support overseas from conservationists and those concerned with global warming. The Co-operative Bank has generously provided nearly \$250,000 to help with the costs of this litigation.

The Co-operative Bank has a customer mandated Ethical Policy which states where it will and will not invest its customers' money. Amongst other issues, the policy states "We will not finance any business whose core activity contributes to global climate change, via the extraction or production of fossil fuels, with an extension to the distribution of those fuels that have a higher global warming impact (e.g. tar sands and certain biofuels)." In 2009, the bank's customers voted to support the Beaver Lake Cree Nation in its fight to save the boreal forest by limiting rampant tar sands expansion.

"Mr. Levant claims that the Co-operative Bank drops off a quarter million dollar check every year to Beaver Lake Cree Nation," the Chief pointed out. "This is simply not true. CFS's generous contributions have amounted to \$250,000 total since the beginning of our relationship two years ago and those funds have gone directly to payments for our legal action."

Chief Lameman would also like to point out that contrary to Mr. Levant's assertions; many First Nations people have real jobs. "We are teachers, and lawyers, and bankers, and doctors. We work in financial markets and in the forest industry. We work in press, radio and television. We expect Mr. Levant will be hearing from First Nations people in all kinds of professions in the very near future about the many interesting jobs and projects they are working on."

Chief Lameman added: "I want to make it very clear – I do not wear a suit to work."

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