

December 11, 2008

The Honourable Jim Prentice
Minister of the Environment, Canada
Les Terrasses de la Chaudière
10 Wellington Street, 28th Floor
Gatineau, Quebec Canada K1A 0H3

The Honourable Rob Renner
Minister of Environment, Alberta
#425 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Prentice and Minister Renner:

Our organizations and Indigenous Peoples are participating in the United Nations climate change talks in Poznan, Poland, and we represent concerned citizens around the world. We are writing to protest your promotion of the Canadian tar sands, which are one of the world's dirtiest sources of oil. Extracting and upgrading synthetic crude oil from tar sands is incredibly energy intensive, generating 3 to 5 times as much greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution as the production of conventional oil. Beyond its contribution to climate change, the tar sands cause unacceptable impacts to fresh water, boreal forest, wildlife and air quality. There is growing opposition to the tar sands from Indigenous Peoples, who are initiating legal suits against development that infringes on their treaty and human rights.

Preventing dangerous global warming will require a transition of our global energy system away from fossil fuels. Not only does tar sands lead to higher rates of GHG pollution from its production, but its consumption further entrenches and enables continued use of fossil fuel for transportation. As such, further development of the tar sands fundamentally undermines the global commitment to combat climate change.

While climate negotiators from around the world gather in Poznan to discuss the steps necessary to curb global warming, climate science shows that industrialized countries like Canada need to reduce their emissions at least 25 to 40% by 2020. Meanwhile, Canada's federal government has set a 2020 GHG reduction target that will reduce emissions less than 3% below 1990 — a target that falls far short of the level needed for Canada to do its fair share to prevent dangerous climate change. This lack of ambition is undoubtedly driven by a desire to allow unfettered growth of the tar sands in Alberta. Shockingly, Alberta's climate change strategy explicitly allows GHG pollution to continue to increase until at least 2020. If Alberta increases its emissions as planned, it would be extremely difficult for Canada to achieve even its inadequate 2020 target, let alone do its fair share.

Time is limited and we need action now. As ministers charged with protecting the environment, it is your responsibility to put the brakes on tar sands expansion. This is vital in order to make progress on climate change both globally and in Canada. At the Poznan conference, Canada has been criticized for justifying a less aggressive emissions target because of tar sands production for export. Canada is failing to do its fair share, and its international reputation is being diminished.

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This need not be the case. Canada has multiple opportunities to tackle its GHG emissions and to change from laggard to leader in the global climate negotiations. A recent economic assessment demonstrates that Canada is fully capable of doing its fair share in avoiding dangerous climate change while maintaining a healthy level of economic and employment growth.¹ The single most important domestic policy option to pursue in the near term is an economy-wide price on greenhouse gas emissions that reaches at least \$50/tonne in 2010 and increases quickly thereafter. This will effectively send a market signal to both business and consumers and create new opportunities while also reducing emissions.

Given that Canada and Alberta have sought to protect further growth of tar sands production in Poznan, it is important to note that there are numerous environmental and social implications from tar sands development that makes further growth untenable:

- In Canada, an area the size of Florida (140,000 square kilometres) could be directly affected by strip mining and in-situ drilling for tar sands. Alberta has leased over 65,000 square kilometres of land for tar sands development without environmental assessment.
- The tar sands are the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Canada.
- Currently tar sands are responsible for around 40 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions; nearly the emissions of the Czech Republic – and emissions may double by 2015.
- By 2020 tar sands GHGs are projected to increase to as much as 141 million tonnes, double the current emissions of all cars and trucks in Canada.
- Producing oil from tar sands mines uses between 2 and 4.5 barrels of water to get a barrel of oil. Tar sands production is licensed to use more water than Alberta's two major cities -- Calgary and Edmonton -- combined.
- Every day tar sands producers burn 600 million cubic feet of natural gas to produce tar sands oil, enough natural gas to heat three million Canadian homes.
- Tailings ponds adjacent to the Athabasca River already cover 130 square kilometers and pose a threat of fresh water contamination and destruction of wildlife.
- Tar sands are located in Alberta's northern boreal forest, part of the world's largest terrestrial storehouse of climate regulating carbon and the home of millions of songbirds and waterfowl.
- Indigenous communities in the tar sands region are most at risk of health effects because they eat food from the land and water. The remote Fort Chipewyan community has an 80% subsistence diet and report high levels of rare cancers.

There is growing evidence that the cumulative environmental impacts of the tar sands is not, and will not, be effectively addressed. For these reasons we urge you to rein in this polluting industry, halt new tar sands approvals, and address the existing environmental damage.

For communications purposes, please contact:

David H. Martin
Greenpeace Canada
33 Cecil Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1N1
416-597-8408 X 3050 In Poznan: +48-500-878-359
E-mail: dave.martin@greenpeace.org

¹ MK Jaccard and Associates Inc. "Exploration of a policy package to reduce Canadian greenhouse gas emissions 25% below 1990 levels by 2020." December 3, 2008 (<http://pubs.pembina.org/reports/2020-prelim-full-e.pdf>)

Organizational Endorsements:

Alliance for Global Justice
American Indian Movement
Campaign for Alternative Industry Network (CAIN)
Canadian Youth Delegation
Centre for Organisation Research and Education (CORE)
Center on Race, Poverty & The Environment
Christopher Reynolds Foundation
Climate Action Network- Canada
Concerned Citizens against Climate Change
Council of Canadians
Dakota Resource Council
David Suzuki Foundation
Dine' Citizens Against Ruining our Environment
Don't Waste Michigan
Dooda (NO) Desert Rock
Earthworks
Ecology Action Center
Edmonton Friends of the North Environmental Society
Edmonton Small Press Association (ESPA)
Environmental Association for Great Lakes Education (EAGLE)
Equiterre
Eyak Preservation Council
GEZEN Foundation for Massive Scale Solar Energy
Friends Of an Unpolluted Lifestyle
Global Forest Coalition
Global Justice Ecology Project
Grandmothers for Peace/San Luis Obispo County Chapter
Green Brigade
Greenpeace Canada
Greenpeace International
Haisla Hereditary Chiefs Strategic Action Committee

Heartwood
Hague Environmental Center (Haags Milieucentrum)
Honor the Earth
I- 4-C (Cross-Cultural Competency Consortium)
Indigenous Environmental Network
Indigenous Peoples Restoration Network
INTERCONNECT
International Indian Treaty Council
International Presentation Association
Keepers of the Athabasca Watershed Council
Members of the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition
Mining Impact Coalition of Wisconsin
NANAI Foundation, (Netherlands Association for North American Indians)
Natural Resources Defense Council
North American Water Office
Oil Change International
Oil Sands truth
Pembina Institute
Plains Justice
Polaris Institute
Public Interest Alberta
Public Trust Alliance
Quill Plains Chapter, Council of Canadians
Rainforest Action Network
Root Force
Save the Wild UP
Save Union County
Science and Environmental Health Network
Science for Peace
Sierra Club Canada
Sierra Club US
Society for Threatened Peoples/Germany
Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC)
Students Against Climate Change
World Rainforest Movement