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The Honourable Carolyn Bennett
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

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The Canadian Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph urges the government of Canada to work vigorously toward a peaceful resolution to the conflict currently underway in the territory of the Wet'suwet'en Nation.

The opposition of Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs to the Coastal GasLink pipeline must not be ignored. Indeed, based on our support for the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), we call for negotiations to be resumed at the highest possible levels to resolve this complex issue without further escalation or use of force.

This conflict shines a light on the need for a fundamental change in relations between the government of Canada and Indigenous communities. The current negotiation and consultation structures in which governments and industries work only through the Indian Act Band Councils are highly problematic. This pattern results in confusion and conflict, particularly in unceded territories such as Wet'suwet'en. It also raises serious questions about whether UNDRIP is being respected.

Reconciliation requires a transition from the old structures of a colonial system to new models of Indigenous governance. Reconciliation also requires an end to the violent removal of unarmed Indigenous peoples who defend their land when old structures are found wanting.

Canada needs a better approach moving forward; one rooted in decolonized principles and structures.