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Native Youth Sexual Health Network statement in support of 4th Annual Tar Sands Healing Walk

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE July 4, 2013 - The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) expresses our support for the 4th Annual Tar Sands Healing Walk, which is occurring from July 5-6, 2013 in Fort McMurray, Alberta. In the spirit of healing and solidarity to all Indigenous communities affected by the destruction of the Tar Sands, we support the Healing Walk and see the devastating effects of environmental violence on sexual and reproductive health and interrelated issues of rights and justice.

As efforts continue to address the harm to the land we also stand in the spirit of healing to address the direct effects on our bodies. At the same time, healing of the land and our bodies together will build healthier communities. When we refer to “reproductive justice”, this is the right to have children, not have children, and to parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments. It allows us to centre our children, families, and communities in this work, which means our movements, actions and strategies can work collaboratively at the intersection of sexual, reproductive, and environmental justice.

Environmental violence is the deliberate release of toxins into our environment and onto our lands and territories despite clear evidence that they cause a range of serious reproductive and other health impacts which disproportionately affect Indigenous women, children and youth. In the work that we do, some of the ways in which environmental violence appears in areas with resource extraction like the Tar Sands include:

- 1.) Increased rates of sexual, domestic and family violence;
- 2.) Elevated rates of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections;
- 3.) Increased rates of reproductive health cancers, and toxins in breast milk;
- 4.) Increased rates of unsafe alcohol and drug use without an increase in harm reduction services and supplies (ie. clean needles and peer support);
- 5.) Disruptive changes in family structure, enforcement of patriarchal masculinity as well as homophobic and transphobic violence; and
- 6.) High rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and Two-Spirit people

The 4th Annual Healing Walk is an opportunity for people from all walks of life to join in a spiritual gathering that will focus on healing the land and the people who are suffering from tar sands expansion. For more information visit: <http://www.healingwalk.org/>

NYSHN supports the need for healing of our lands through ceremony which is the spirit behind the Tar Sands Healing Walk. Coming together in ceremony as communities to discuss these issues and respond through walking together in solidarity are all part of resisting the continued effects of environmental violence, and the direct impacts to sexual and reproductive health. We wish all participants and organizers a safe journey!

Resources and more information:

1) Joint statement on Environmental Violence and Reproductive Health to Special Rapporteur on Rights of Indigenous Peoples - UNPFII 12th session

<http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/nyshn7specialerapporteur.pdf>

2) International Indigenous Women's Reproductive and Environmental Health Initiative declarations for health, life and defense of our lands, rights and future generations

1st declaration: <http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/july12010.pdf>

2nd declaration: <http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/apr292012.pdf>

3) Environmental Justice, STI's and Indigenous youth (page 9)

<http://headandhands.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/STIigma-Zine-complete.pdf>

4) Environmental/Land Justice for Metis Women and Youth as HIV Prevention

<http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/metisvoice.html>

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network works with Indigenous youth and communities across the United States and Canada to advocate for and build strong, comprehensive, and culturally safe sexuality and reproductive health, rights, and justice initiatives in their own communities.

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Our Bodies Are Not Terra Nullius



by Erin Marie Konsmo

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