My name is Janelle Nahmabin, also known as Mskwaanakwod Kwe, Red Cloud Woman. I’m from Aamjiwnaang First Nation on the outskirts of Sarnia, Ontario here in Canada. Also known as Chemical Valley. This is where 40% of Canada’s petrochemicals come from. My small First Nation community is surrounded by over 60 petrochemical facilities. As a result, Aamjiwnaang’s Inherent Rights & Human Rights & Nature rights been the sacrifice zone for industry for over 100 years. Last week, my community went into lockdown due to dangerously high benzene levels. Still in lockdown down. Children sick, our child care & school closed, our administration closed, people stayed indoors and fear the air even indoors is toxic. Why? Because we’re a stone throw away from a massive INEOS plant that uses and releases benzene to produce styrene – a chemical used to make one of the most used plastics. Our concern isn’t only this one facility, but this one is hurting my community in real time. Yesterday, our Council declared a State of Emergency due to another benzene leak in the community that would never be allowed in a city like Ottawa or Toronto.

What I’m sharing is nothing new. In fact, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Health & Toxics visited my community when doing a tour of Canada. His report was issued in 2022 and for the sake of time, I’ll encourage you to read it.

With the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples being adopted, it needs to be included in the Plastic Treaty because the people impacted by plastic pollution from extraction, through pipelines to refineries to microplastics are the ones being impacted the most. Mostly Indigenous Peoples around the world.

It’s worth mentioning that the environment I live in is a result of inadequate regulations, monitoring & enforcement. Plastic pollution has been able to increase in my nation due to lack of regulations that would protect our rights & health from plastic pollution. We need stricter regulations that eliminate chemicals and polymers of concern with deadlines for outcomes that are enforced. And not in 100 years like the people of Aamjiwnaang have had to go through and continue to go through. Industry self-reporting isn’t working, we need regulations that guarantee Aamjiwnaang and Indigenous Peoples around the world a safe & healthy environment. We don’t need any new plastic facilities. What we need is a binding cap on plastic production moving forward. And in the meantime, my community can’t wait any longer for action. I am calling on Canadian governments and the world to take immediate action to hold companies who are making us sick accountable.

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