"The Elders Said if We Stop Fishing We Will Die, We Will No Longer Exist": Hannah Arendt's Black Holes, Canadian Corporate Mining Impunity, and Indigenous Narrative Resistance

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Human rights violations in Canada and abroad are endemic to the mining industry. Gordon and Webber's 2016 The Blood of Extraction: Canadian Imperialism in Latin America catalogues Canadian Corporate Mining (CCM) environmental and human rights abuses that, since 2000, have reached an epidemic frequency. Reports by non-profit human rights organizations Mining Watch, Rights Action, San Miguel Ixtahuacán Defense Front, The Justice and Corporate Accountability Project, Unit for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders in Guatemala, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International document exploitation, human rights violations and disregard of indigenous peoples' rights by CCM. Neoliberal imperialist exploitation scales easily across radically unequal geopolitical regimes; the reports are disturbingly similar in their accounts of exploitation and their calls for justice (Russell, 2016). An unequal balance of economic power between the Global North and Global South, as well as a legacy of power imbalances between colonial states and indigenous peoples underpins this exploitation. Further, legal, financial and moral impunity perpetuates CCM corporate violence; in this essay I examine how impunity in CCM functions and how it can be resisted.

CCM impunity works in paradoxical reciprocity with the robust notion of Canada as a uniquely humanitarian nation. As recently as a June 2017, a United Nations Working Group (UNWG) for Business Ethics report to Ottawa, prepared after a UNWG mission to Canada, commends Canada for "demonstrating leadership in promoting human rights, including of women, both within and outside Canada" (UNWG, 2017). The same UNWG report notes that Canadian mining practices abroad and at home fail to "fully address human rights due diligence" (2017). These failures are well documented by human rights organizations who report to the United Nations Working Group

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of Business Ethics as well as by first person accounts from community members facing violence, loss of land, and local environmental pollution. Later in this paper I present First Nations Chief Darrell Bob's report to the UNWG at Williams Lake, BC (Bob, 2017). Behind the UN's milquetoast scolding of Canada for tarnishing its human rights reputation are thousands of reports of human rights and environmental abuses. Further, Canada is recognized as a human rights promoter even while the state subsidizes the activities of Canadian Mining Corporations (CCMs) at home and abroad as they violate human rights in spirit and in practice (Kading and Bass, 2014; Churchill, 2002; Bowman, 2017). These subsidies come in the form of diplomatic government intervention in support of CCM, financial incentive to CCM, and a refusal to hold CCM accountable for human rights violations.

In 2005 Canadian parliamentary sub-committee on Human Rights and International Development reported out on the seriousness of the problem of "the effective impunity of Canadian mining companies operating overseas in weak-governance zones" such as Honduras, Mexico and Guatemala (Coumans, 2014, 29). The committee recommended Canada enact formal governance measures to hold corporations accountable, for example, but making protection of human rights a condition of financial and diplomatic services provided by Canadian bodies; these recommendations have not been met (Coumans, 2014).

How, then, can Canadian Corporations and the Canadian State claim responsible humanitarian citizenship at home and abroad? Here I turn to another scholar whose work examines systemic state-sponsored violence. Published in 1961, political theorist and philosopher Hannah Arendt's Eichmann in Jerusalem: The Banality of Evil investigates the mechanisms through which state regimes and individual actors maintain privately held moral impunity as well as publicly claimed moral and legal impunity even while engaging in the most grave and systematic human rights violations. Her study of state violence, impunity and responsibility in the trial of Nazi Adolf Eichmann uncovers that which was "unprecedented in the Nazi genocide. . .in order to understand a crime against humanity, one that would acknowledge the destruction of Jews, Gypsies, gay people, communists, the disabled and the ill" (Butler, 2011). Arendt's analysis of the administration of genocide yields insight into the role of impunity in systematic human rights violations; in particular I look to her formulation of the function of "black holes" of impunity for both individual actors and states guilty of systemic violence. Beyond analysis of the structures of impunity, Arendt limns how the light of resistance escapes these

black holes of impunity. These resistances show us how to work as allies in a time of the TRC, UNDRIP, and increasingly exploitative CCM.

My position in this paper is relevant; I am a non-indigenous woman of Canadian citizenship. I'm implicit in and I benefit from the ongoing colonization and theft of Indigenous people's cultures and land. I draw on my Eurocentric cultural and intellectual heritage and training as I seek to understand, to critique, and to battle corporate and state colonial impunity. As an ally in the cross-border indigenous rights struggle, I work to intervene in human rights violations perpetrated by Canada's settler colonial culture with which I am professionally, culturally and financially embedded.

As an imperialist nation, Canada continues to benefit from capital extracted from impoverished and politically destabilized nations in the Global South (Gordon and Webber, 2016). Canada is not unique in this position; Global North partners similarly extract capital from poorer, less politically stable, more densely populated nations. Unlike its Global North partners, Canada is home to the vast majority of the world's mining investment and deals. Mining investment regulations in Canada are weak and 60% of the world's exploration and mining corporations are listed on the TSE (Gedicks, 2015). And of course, Canada claims model humanitarian citizenship.

Of the mining resources listed on the TSE, many are located on the homes of indigenous people living in colonial states. By 2025, it is estimated that about "half of all mineral resources targeted by mining companies will come from territories" used or mostly inhabited "by Indigenous peoples" (Gedicks, 2015, 131). Globally, indigenous people – for a number of reasons – are "disproportionately vulnerable to deteriorating environmental conditions" (Gedicks, 2015 130). These circumstances mean that indigenous people are overrepresented amongst those who are displaced, disregarded, injured, killed or otherwise hurt by mining abuses in the Global North and the Global South (Gordon and Webber, 2016; Geddicks, 2015; Churchill, 2002).

In the case of Honduras, Canada has been accused of contributing to the political instability from which it benefits. In 2012, after a military-backed coup in Honduras removed democratically elected anti-mining president Zelaya, Canadian technocrats, including Ambassador Cameron MacKay, representatives from the now defunct CIDA, and from Canadian Mining Corp Breakwater Resources, lobbied the new government to reverse the Honduran moratorium on open-pit mining (Russell, 2017; Spring, 2016). As a result, while the post-coup economy has been "devastating for most Hondurans," it has been

beneficial for Canadian corporate interests (Gordon and Webber, 2016, 84). A report from Mining Watch Canada is clear about Canadian influence on Honduras' reversal on open-pit mining:

"Canada supported the 2009 military coup in Honduras that ushered in a series of neoliberal reforms to the detriment of communities, signed a free trade agreement with the post-coup regime, and funded and supervised the writing of the new Mining Code, approved in 2013. The Canadian government's public policy and promotion of Canadian mining companies in Honduras makes it responsible in part for the devastating environment and social impacts caused by mining companies in La Unión, Copán" (Spring, 2016, 2).

Multiple local public resistance actions expressed opposition to open-pit mining; a 2011 poll showed that 90% of Hondurans were against open-pit mining (Spring, 2016). Since the 2012 reversal, organizations have documented multiple instances of Canadian Mining Corps violating basic legal procedures in order to establish and operate mines in Honduras with absolute legal impunity. Aural Minerals, a CMC, is expanding a cyanide leaching gold mine in Western Honduras, a project that includes the destruction of a 200-year-old community cemetery, the forcible displacement of the communities of San Miguel and San Andrés Minas, and violent repression of local protests (Spring, 2016). In the case of Honduras, CMC, with the support of Canadian government representatives have contributed to the structural erosion of democratic human rights. Canadian government technocrats have intervened to support CMC operations that violate human rights at proposed and operating mine sites.

Similarly, in Guatemala, an extractive economy benefits Canadian Corporate Mining interests. In 2011, assets of Canadian mining in Guatemala "were about \$1.3 billion," making Guatemala the country in Central America with the greatest amount of Canadian mining assets (Spring, 2016). And, as in Honduras, there is significant and ongoing resistance from local communities; human rights organizations continue to "vigorously" reject "efforts on the part of the Guatemalan state, foreign corporations," and Canadian corporate and state representatives to eliminate community opposition (Spring, 2016). One of the most egregious cases of this, and a clear example of Canadian corporate impunity, is the murder of Adolfo Ich.

In 2009, community leader and peaceful indigenous activist Adolfo Ich was murdered by security guard Mynor Padilla. Padilla, hired by CMC HudBay Minerals, also shot German Chub, another community member. As a result of the shooting German is permanently paralyzed. For both shootings there are multiple witnesses as well as ballistic and forensic evidence that Padilla shot Ich and Chub. Hudbay funded testimony in support of the accused; the legal processes in Guatemala were corrupted by this imbalance of financial and judicial access. In September of 2016, as the case continues, the home of Angelina Choc, Adolfo Ich's widow and children was the target of a midnight gunfire attack in September of 2016. It is Choc herself who is bringing charges against HudBay, and for the first time, a Canadian court has allowed the charges against Hudbay to be presented in a Canadian court. While the endemic problem of CMC taking advantage of Central American judicial infrastructure damaged by centuries of colonialism, extractive neoliberalism, and foreignfunded coups will not be rectified by this particular case being moved to a Canadian court, this case represents a significant challenge to a tradition of impunity in CMC.

Corruption of process, regulatory capture, and disrespect of Indigenous communities exists in CMC operations in Canada as well as internationally. Canadian legal and moral responsibility towards Indigenous people has a vexed history; in 2016 Canada became a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights on Indigenous People, and in 2017 completed the first step of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Land title and land use are central to the ongoing TRC process; in 2017 the National Centre for the TRC states that the process is ongoing, and the TRC, "will...encourage community members to share their experiences of other policies of aggressive assimilation in Canada, encouraging dialogue on topics such as land claims, water, education, poverty, and missing and murdered Aboriginal women" (TRC, 2017). Canadian extractive projects, established decades ago without consent or regard for indigenous peoples' rights to the land and waters, continue to operate on unceded and treaty Indigenous territory.

In the context of the TRC and UNDRIP, the 2014 mining disaster at Quesnel Lake, a fjord lake on unceded Secwepemc territory, close to the town of Williams Lake, is an opportunity for redress of colonial extractivism and a potential case of egregious ongoing impunity. On this unceded territory, inhabited by indigenous people since time immemorial without a treaty agreement, Imperial Metals operates a copper and gold mine. On August 4th,

2014, the earthen walls of the tailings storage facility, weakened structurally and filled to capacity with mining effluent, shifted, broke open, and let 25 billion liters of mining waste into the Quesnel Lake watershed. The watershed flows into the Quesnel River and the Fraser River, and the spill reached the wild and trade food sources of multiple Indigenous peoples downstream, including Secwepemc, Tsilhqot'in, Dene, and St'at'imc nations. The Fraser River flows south through some of BC's most intense commercial agricultural areas, through Vancouver, and then into the Pacific Ocean. And for this, the biggest mining spill in Canadian history, an event that affected a sacred watershed and the food sources of many communities, with measurable environmental damage, Imperial Metals has not been fined, has not been sanctioned, and has, in fact, been allowed to reopen and has been granted permission to permanently release effluent in the watershed (Bowman, 2017).

On May 28th, 2017, the United Nations Working Group on Business Ethics visited Williams Lake for a full day of meetings. I attended the meetings. The UNWG listened to indigenous and non-indigenous community members about the spill; overwhelmingly local people spoke of manipulation, disregard, lies, and repression. Community members want justice for the spill's damage, they want their land back, and they want assurance that their food and water sources would be rehabilitated. Community representatives, including elders, elected chiefs and council members, nurses, and natural scientists also noted the appearance of regulatory capture, a situation in which regulation of an industry is conducted in favour of the industry. Regulatory capture is an effect of intertwined government and industry interests, and leaves indigenous and nonindigenous people without access to justice. Extractive industry expert Catherine Coumans cites a number of recent UN and other international studies that highlight "the predilection of governments and corporations for voluntary selfregulation over binding regulatory or legal obligations" (Coumans, 2014, 33). Self-regulation is a behavioural outcome of a corporate-legislative relationship of impunity. It is also relative to the problem of systemic impunity and regulatory capture to note that Imperial Metals has donated \$234,000 to the BC Liberal party, the party governing BC from 2001 to 2017.

CMC human rights violations in Canada are more closely tied to policy and regulatory manipulations than the shootings and civil rights oppressions seen in Central America; however, in light of UNDRIP and the TRC, projects that proceed or continue without community consent create structural, ethical, and citizenship impunity problems. Currently, the KGHM Ajax Mining

Proposal for a gold and copper mine on unceded Secwpemc territory near the city of Kamloops has met absolute opposition from the Stk'emlupsemc Secwepemc Nation (SSN). The SSN states clearly that it does not consent to the development of the mine and that the project is "fundamentally opposed" to Indigenous land use at the site, a position to which over 50 non-indigenous environmental and academic groups have signed as supporters. Yet, the KGHM Ajax Mining Corporation has been reassured by MP Kathy McLeod and by outgoing BC Premier Christy Clark that indigenous resistance will not impede the mine. Kading and Bass state that:

"The fact that the Ajax proposal has proceeded as far as it has represents just how removed Canadian authorities are from intuitively acknowledging and enforcing any meaningful precautionary principle that anticipates the negative effects of resource extraction, and why approval of the Ajax mine would be precedent setting for corporate investment" (Kading and Bass, 2014, 20).

In fact, while countless resource extractive projects in Canada have been developed in spite of significant community resistance, particularly from Indigenous peoples, it is the presence of UNDRIP and the TRC that makes ongoing extractive impunity precedent setting. Is CMC impunity so firmly entrenched in Canadian nation building that it is immune to all rights-based and reconciliation structures?

The problem of CMC impunity has multiple damaging effects. First, it is a fundamental problem for reconciliation. With a history of land theft, forced residential schools, forced sterilization, and broken treaties, impunity for historic and ongoing mining operations limits any path forward for reconciliation. Impunity is the opposite of reconciliation and the two simply cannot coexist. Reconciliation requires a calling forth of culpability, a recognition of violence past and present, and impunity functions to erase the very presence of guilt in actors. If a crime is not called a crime, a murder not a murder, poison not called poison, then Canadian Corporate Mining interests can profess innocence. Adolfo Ich's death would never be accounted for, the effluent in Quesnel Lake can never be called biocide or poison, the loss of salmon and berries and mosses can never be mourned, and the desolation of blasted mountains can never be grieved. Certainly, impunity is a fundamental

mechanism of genocide; impunity for crimes against a population locates that population outside the protection afforded by human rights; people whose experiences, narratives, lives, and deaths are irrelevant or non-existent lay no legal or ontological claim to land or life. Impunity relegates life and land to neoliberalism's garbage heap.

As well as having multiple points of impact, impunity is resilient. Hannah Arendt examines this resilience, finding two fundamental mechanisms through which political and ethical impunity is established. In the first instance, impunity must always overcome the "problem" of conscience – Arendt describes the Nazi hierarchy's mechanism of overcoming the "natural instinct of pity in the presence of physical suffering." Faced with CMC technocrats steadfast in their rejection of the pleas of community members, I have observed this seeming lack of the "instinct of pity," and while pity might be the slightest of reconciliation gestures, it suggests culpability. Arendt writes that the Nazi hierarchy trained their operatives to locate that feeling of pity but to turn it around. Thus, "instead of saying 'What horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: 'what horrible things I had to watch in pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulder!!" (Arendt, 1961, 106).

In a 1943 speech to high-ranking SS functionaries, Himmler reminded the murderers of their inherent decency and of their historic task: "Most of you know what it means when 100 corpses lie there, or when 500 corpses lie there, or when 1,000 corpses lie there. To have gone through this and - apart from a few exceptions caused by human weakness - to have remained decent, that has made us great. That is a page of glory in our history which has never been written and which will never be written" (Agambem, 2002, 78). Under this direction, the party officials were asked to accommodate a weight of emotional labour, and specifically advised to ignore the suffering of others. For the work of their own emotional labour (the difficulty of seeing so many corpses), their superiors offered a glorious reward. Nazi messaging assured them they were involved in something "historic, grandiose, unique - a great task" of national and global importance (Arendt 1961, 105). A Nazi state would be globally unique at an unprecedented historic scale; this metanarrative was infinitely more glorious than the truly pathetic and thus relatively insignificant troubles caused by the murder of men, women and children. Moral discomfort and the problem of pity were easily swept aside by stoic nationalism.

In the case of CCM, the mechanism for overcoming moral discomfort exists in promotion of Canada as an inherently humanitarian nation. Humanitarian Canada is a "vehicular idea" (Chewinski, 2014) with remarkable resiliency. Canada as a uniquely humanitarian nation adheres to corporate interests when CMCs and Canadian government technocrats promise that mineral exploitation, regardless of conditions of local consent, lifts communities out of poverty. For example, in 2014, James Lambert, then Canadian Ambassador to the Netherlands promoted Canadian humanitarianism when he announced that Canadian state supported mining projects are ecologically and socially beneficial for local inhabitants (Pedersen, 2014, 94). This promise of upward mobility is credible because it issues from a nation already heavily associated with compassionate humanitarianism. In this way international resource exploitation projects are able to "mas[k]" the violence inherent in neoliberal exploitation (Chewinski, 2014). And when violence is uncovered, friendly international bodies often frame criticism within a confirmation of Canada's identity as a morally superior nation.

The assumption that Canada is essentially humanitarian explains why external and internal analysis of Canadian foreign policy often presents Canadian corporate human rights violations as "confused, rooted in a misunderstanding of the region, or as a simple expression of our subordinate relationship to the United States" (Gordon and Webber, 2016, 3). The remarkable resilience of Canada's identity as a nation that is fundamentally moral functions like Arendt's nationalist "great task." It is grandiose and hypocritical to claim moral superiority regardless of multiple and ongoing human rights violations; in order to keep humanitarian Canada robust, the violations are presented as exceptions or accidents, even when they have been occurring for 150 years, like the systematic disenfranchisement and oppression of Indigenous people. And like Arendt's "great task," Canadian humanitarianism is presented as a uniquely Canadian citizenship value. With this mechanism of overcoming guilt with a priori nationalist innocence, Canada maintains impunity; there is more room for "natural pity" towards the supposedly confused, US co-opted, and misinformed Canadian corporations than for the victims themselves.

And yet, evidence for the suffering of victims of state violence emerges to challenge state metanarratives. Arendt recognizes a second mechanism for the problem of evidence: the state constructs "holes of oblivion," places of non-relevance (Arendt, 1963, 233). The state utilizes these to disappear and to erase

the acts of violence, the evidence, and the victims. Holes of oblivion are discursive in that the idea of murder or crime is cast aside, with tricks of bureaucracy. Impunity carries on because nothing is made to have existed; through ontological reassignment, erasure of documents, broken treaties, deaths of Indigenous men and women in colonial custody, mountains of inaccessible data about watersheds, and residential schools, people are made to disappear. The holes of oblivion in genocide and environmental violence are multiple and diverse. Holes of oblivion are material as well as discursive; Arendt evokes the mass murders in which bodies are buried, hidden, burned, and unmarked. Without evidence of a murder, there is no murder; there remains only a case for impunity. In colonial extractivism, once people are physically forced from their land, the holes of oblivion are deep and CMCs claim the land; impunity and terra nullius operate in tandem.

Mechanisms of impunity are as efficient as their totalizing discursive machines; they weaken under the power of resistance narratives. Arendt concludes her examination of impunity with an assurance that the totalitarian state's impunity always fails. Even the most oppressive regimes are made up of unpredictable, unregimentable people; "[n]othing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left alive to tell the story" [sic] (Arendt, 1963, 233). Totalitarian regimes need to condemn resistance, both from within the ranks of oppressive forces and from the oppressed populations, to holes of oblivion. But as Arendt points out, stories of resistance survive all regimes. Arendt's elaboration of the importance of resistance to totalitarianism takes into account the relative futility of most resistance; most Nazi resisters died before witnessing any results of their courage. Nevertheless, the stories of resistance, the words of those who reject impunity and call for justice, those who welcome the flooding feelings of pity, sorrow, and rage, resonate across history. These narratives are bright explosions, fissures of light in holes of oblivion.

For this reason, I close this essay with the amplification of a resistance narrative to CMC injustice, in the context of colonial extractivism on unceded indigenous territory. This resistance narrative calls out impunity, calls out injustice, and calls forward the lives of indigenous people; it requires no additional analysis from me. Holes of oblivion lose their power reconciliation when people tell their resistance stories. At the aforementioned May 2017 UN Working Group publicly open mission meeting in Williams Lake, BC, Chief Darrell Bob of the St'at'imc Nation, Xax'lip Nation community, spoke these

words, recorded here with his permission, in the style of his powerful oratory. He speaks to injustice of persecution of his people for living the ways they have always lived. He speaks out against the impunity enjoyed by Imperial Metals, three years after the disaster at Mt Polley Mine. Chief Darrell Bob's narrative raises up the lives of elders, of young people, of fish, of waters; he calls forth historic agreements and historic assaults, and he frames CMC in colonialism and his people's lives as resistance:

Thank you in a good way for being here to listen to our people. I want to talk about corporate corruption at its highest level. Last year one of our young men [Donovan] got charged for *fishing*.

A fine of 800 dollars for fishing.

A man who lives off of fish cannot fish, is charged the fine, does not pay it, has to go to jail! We [have] got Imperial Metals at the Mt Polley disaster...[the spill] destroyed millions of [salmon] fry. We are going to, as a St'at'imc Nation, we will take them, as well as the provincial government, to court.

So what that little story, tells us about the value of compensation...Millions of fish are going to be destroyed in the future. I will be dead before we understand the full impacts of Mt Polley.

We have an ecosystem management plan. We have never been consulted by

Imperial metals or the provincial government or the federal government to approve any mining yet it does *impact* us.

There is no *indirect* impact. We all live with the waters. That food sources feed a lot of people. The impact of that mine is disastrous. The biggest corruption I see right now is that the mine has not been charged.

The province has not been charged. From my understanding and hearing, the DFO [Department of Fisheries and Oceans] locked the doors when the disaster happened. Accountability!

The only ones accountable in this so-called province are what they called the taxpayers, the fee simple. They are the ones who are going to pay the bill for the company to ruin the land. That is guaranteed

insurance. The process has to be looked at.

The question, the recommendation, is that to have FPIC [Free, Prior and Informed Consent] you must associate all of the tribes that are tied to that life line. When you think about that, that is a huge undertaking. But that is how we. . .it was through marriage and family ties we had the ways to stay unified as a nation, that is true consent, the understanding of natural law.

We are going to put forward [as a claim related to the Mt.Polley TSF spill] 800 dollars a fish for all the millions of fish they destroyed based on the charges laid on our people trying to lead a healthy life. Now we don't even know if that life will be healthy anymore.

We do not stop fishing! The elders said if we stop fishing we will die, we will no longer exist.

Not this year but next year we will have the true impacts of Mt Polley starting to come forward. We need to explore as a unified front. The challenge. We need to change the thinking. It is not just

sustainable living in one community. So in a good way, thank you.

Because when we look at it, the mine is open now and they are still spilling into the lakes, there is more money [needed] for this community to clean that mine up and clean the water up than there is for mining. It is going to take a lifetime to clean up. It is. We have no treaty with the province of BC nor Canada. They are just corporations trying to take our resources and I will tell you why.

Our elders talked about an agreement between the queen and our people of the St'at'imc, thus given a crown and a staff that was given to our people. One third one third one third. This agreement meant that one third of resources went to Canada, one third to whomever in the crown for the purposes of our medical, our social, our health, education - the queen agreed to that - the third was that a third of that belonged to our nation so that they could be sustainable into the future. That was the agreement.

As a young man, about this tall [holds hand at waist] I

remember playing with that staff. We always wondered what that was for until an elder, Ernest Jacob, brought it forward and told us what it was. These agreements are real to our people.

We don't have an agreement at treaty.

We also believe that every community tied to the Fraser river fishing system should be provided an opportunity to do studies on the fish of the system. It's a must because we are going to realize in the future that this spill is going to impact all of us.

The regulations are meaningless. They are to corrupt the voters to think they are going to follow this system, to divide native and non-native, to marginalize our people. Our elders have always said, first and foremost protect the water

because with the water we will always exist. Our recommendation is to investigate our companies and our province. They should be charged. They should be charged, as was Donovan, for one fish.

The second is, every community on the Fraser [River] should be able to do a study. We did, we flew our own people in, we had water samples done, we paid on our own. We know in the future we need this evidence. In closing I want to thank you for taking your time. Here you have grassroots people who struggle daily. The reserves are third world...We totally rely on the land. Without question we have to change the laws of the land according to natural land that we live with it.

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