**OPENING**

**Lakshmi Fjord, Chair – People’s Tribunal on Human Rights and Environmental Justice Impacts of Fracked Gas Infrastructure**

Welcome to all of you here and on live-stream to the People’s Tribunal on the Human Rights and Environmental Justice Impacts of Fracked Gas Infrastructure. I’m Lakshmi Fjord of Friends of Buckingham. This event idea arose in direct response to the violent and racist events of August 11-12 in Charlottesville, in which I, and many here, participated as nonviolent witnesses. Virginians ask ourselves: where do we stand on the racist heritage of Virginia? How and where does racism manifest itself in present day social systems and institutions? Today, in this tribunal, one of those question is: What direct relationship is there between the extremist racist violence perpetrated in the name of preserving Virginia’s heritage in Civil War monuments these Confederate generals explicitly didn’t want -- and the slow violence of locating the Atlantic Coast Pipeline’s only enormous, highly toxic polluting Virginia compressor station in an 85% African American, historic Freedmen community of Union Hill, Buckingham, Virginia? What are the cost benefits of racism specifically and environmental injustice more broadly?

Today, together, each one of us is helping by our attention and presence to create a safe place to listen to, observe, and learn from people telling their stories from across West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina. They are people whose communities, cultural resources and heritage lands, economic wherewithal, and present clean air, water, and soil are now the resources on the routes of two new fracked gas interstate pipelines -- the Atlantic Coast and the Mountain Valley Pipelines.

Because the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission or FERC issued both pipelines their certificates of use on Oct. 13th, 2017 many people who wanted to give testimony cannot, because already surveyors are entering their lands without permission. This heightened distress felt by those present only reinforces the need to make City Space right now a sacred place -- a place of shared attention and intent created by our thoughts and actions.

\*With that in mind, please turn off and put away your phones for there will be no photography, video or audiotaping except by the tribunal documentarians.

\*Please enjoy the bounty of food at the buffet given by our generous donors, and do so in silence, as if on a silent retreat.

\*Allow yourself the rare opportunity to fully become *the witness* for others’ sakes.

\*If you experience the pressing need to talk, please do so in the large patio outside the front door.

\*The accessible bathroom is to your left on this hall. It may be accessed through the hallway on your far left. Please keep an aisle on your right for speakers to pass up and back to the podium.

What you will hear and see today has its roots in pasts that have not passed. We begin and end with testimonies from Native Americans – for all lands we now cherish including those on these pipeline routes were once part of that diverse set of nations. Where their ancestors faced colonizers’ appropriations and displacements of families and communities -- the impacts of which are still felt in discriminations that include environmental racism.

With the design of this particular people’s tribunal, my hope is that the evidence given here will have maximum traction and not disappear. To ensure that, we are live-streaming through our Facebook page and will keep the live-stream archived on a Tribunal website. We will send the entirety of this videotape, the expanded written testimonies of speakers here and those not able to attend, to the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal on Fracking as evidence for their hearing in Rome in 2018. We will make short and longer videos of these testimonies. Our intent is for this event to make testifiers’ voices as widely accessible as possible. To inform those new to this issue using evidence of human rights concerns and environmental injustices occurring right before our eyes. For, these have largely been made invisible because of the power of the forces seeking to silence and erase them.

Now, I have the great pleasure of introducing you to our panel of experts serving as our judges.

**Lois Gibbs** is the founder and Executive Director of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, a 36-year-old advocacy group that has helped over 15,000 grassroots groups with their struggles for justice and human rights. And, this tribunal is the outcome of such a CHEJ grant to Friends of Buckingham. As a 27-year-old housewife in 1978, Lois organized her neighbors to oppose a 20,000-ton toxic chemical dump in Niagara Falls, NY, next to her child's school. She and the Love Canal Homeowners Association successfully fought Occidental Petroleum and government officials to win a major victory two years later and protect her community. Lois has received many awards for her work, including the Goldman Environmental Prize, the Heinz Award, and the John Gardner Leadership Award. In 2003, she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize as a result of her tireless efforts, which continue to this day.

**Dr. Adrienne Hollis** is the Director of Federal Policy at WE ACT for Environmental Justice, a 30-year-old environmental justice advocacy group that works to empower and organize low-income, people of color to build healthy communities for all. As an experienced environmental toxicologist and environmental attorney, Dr. Hollis has worked with many community organizations building a wealth of experience in community-based participatory research on environmental justice issues. She teaches at the American University Washington College of Law and the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health.

**Dr. James Igoe** is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Virginia. His work focuses on how people’s experiences of their place in the world relate to nature, including in conflicts between nature conservation efforts and indigenous and local communities, community-based development, and grassroots social movements in Tanzania, Pine Ridge, South Dakota, and New Orleans, Louisiana.

At the close of the testimonies, the judges will retire to write their statement of opinion and recommendations. While they do this, we turn off our recordings and gather together for facilitated Next Steps Organizing. This is when each present may give voice to how best to strategize with this rare assembly across the geography of 2 pipelines to plan collaborative actions.

As part of our mission to make information about these pipeline impacts more accessible to the general public, we begin our testimonies with representatives from each of 4 cultural categories of environmental justice communities. Since economic profits are why people face these environmental impacts, we have asked for overviews of both.

We have asked the testifiers to keep to a strict time limit only because of the huge response by people wishing to give testimonies. Please know we respect and honor your voices and wish we didn’t have to shorten your important evidence. It is only in the interest of inclusion that we do this. Thank you for your understanding!

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**NEXT STEPS ORGANIZING**

Now, we turn off our live-stream and videotaping and turn to Next Steps Organizing. We are so fortunate that Vernice Miller-Travis is able to be our lead facilitator. She leads an environmental consulting group, Miller-Travis & Associates, and is a Senior Associate at SKEO Solutions. Through both, she works with communities undergoing economic dis-investment and environmental degradation to implement community revitalization and sustainable redevelopment. She is re-appointed to the US EPA’s National Environmental Justice Advisory Council.

For our Breakout groups, we have a great line-up of skilled facilitators:

Michele Mattioli Virginia Organizing

Carolyn Reilly    Bold Alliance

Lee White          Cvlle Rising

Ken King            Virginia Student Environmental Coalition - VSEC

Lou Cross VSEC

Lakshmi Fjord    Friends of Buckingham (social media & tribunal submission)

AFTER ORGANIZING

**CLOSING: Judges Statement and Recommendations**

Video: **RISING UP**