



Society of Environmental Journalists

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The Honorable Marco Mendicino
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Dear Minister Mendicino:

The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) stands with the [Canadian Association of Journalists](#) and the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) in calling on you to investigate the illegal arrests of journalists Amber Bracken and Michael Toledano and take decisive action to end the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's (RCMP) repeated violations of journalists' right to report.

Bracken, a photojournalist on assignment with *The Narwhal*, and Toledano, an independent documentary film-maker, were detained by the RCMP on Nov. 19 during police enforcement of an injunction barring interference with construction of a Coastal GasLink pipeline in Wet'suwet'en territory in British Columbia.

The two journalists were present to document Indigenous-led opposition to the project, one of several land disputes rooted in Canada's ongoing legacy of oppression of its Indigenous peoples. It is an important story about which the public needs to know more.

Instead, according to a [news report](#), Bracken and Toledano were taken into custody along with the protestors and their images and cameras seized even though they identified themselves as journalists. They were jailed for three days before being released and their property returned, but they still face a hearing on contempt of court charges.

An RCMP statement said the two were arrested because they were "embedded" with the protestors. But the CAJ points out that has never been illegal in Canada, as courts have upheld journalists' right to report in areas under similar injunctions.

[Recent reporting](#) also has revealed that even before their arrests, the RCMP was monitoring Bracken and Toledano in a national database that tracks law enforcement investigations. That is troubling, since no evidence has been presented that either had committed any crimes.

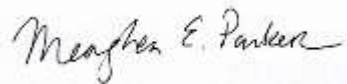
Their arrest is part of a troubling pattern. On Nov. 18, the RCMP detained independent filmmaker Melissa Cox, who was later released without charges. This was the second time Cox has been detained while covering a land dispute related to the Wet'suwet'en territory. Previous charges of mischief and trespass were thrown out of court last summer. In addition to Cox, law

enforcement also arrested Indigenous journalist and podcast host Karl Dockstader, who was covering a land dispute in Ontario. Those charges were later withdrawn.

Earlier this year, the RCMP also limited access for journalists reporting on the enforcement of an injunction prohibiting the blocking of logging roads in British Columbia's Fairy Creek watershed and arrested a local photojournalist. In response to a petition from the CAJ and a media coalition, a B.C. Supreme Court Justice in August found that the media restrictions set up by RCMP officers and the expansive exclusion zones they imposed were unlawful and "seriously and substantially" impacted important liberties.

As an organization that represents environmental journalists, SEJ looks to Canada's government to uphold press freedoms as an essential part of an equitable and just society. We expect any charges against Bracken and Toledano to be dropped or dismissed, as they have been in similar cases. But this interference with the public's right to know must stop. SEJ calls on you to hold the RCMP accountable for these abuses and ensure that journalists' fundamental rights are upheld.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Meaghan E. Parker". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the typed name.

Meaghan Parker
Executive Director
mparker@sej.org
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CC:

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau
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