



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 17, 2020

The AMC responds to changes to Band Council election rules during the COVID-19 pandemic

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba – The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) Grand Chief Arlen Dumas reluctantly accepts the Statement by the Minister of Indigenous Services on April 16, 2020, regarding the temporary regulation, *First Nations Election Cancellation and Postponement Regulations (Prevention of Diseases)* to the *Indian Act* ensuring the continuance of governance of First Nations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas said, “These changes to the elections rules are necessary for the safety of First Nations in Manitoba, and provides them with a bit of certainty as they deal with COVID-19. The process was far from perfect as First Nations in Manitoba were not consulted on these changes and given that a number of First Nations had begun or were about to begin the process of electing their Chief and Council. We recognize that timing was an issue caused by the spread of COVID-19 and government was focused on the health and emergency management aspect of the pandemic. However, an approach closer to reconciliation that recognizes the self-determination of First Nations in Manitoba would have found a better way rather than relying on utilizing regulations to annex the *Indian Act*. Particularly for those First Nations who have customary election codes, as this regulation purports to apply to those Nations. This is not the first pandemic we have worked our way through. These types of issues could be resolved after any emergency, be it a pandemic, flood, fire, etc. With that said, these new time constrained regulations are warranted at this unprecedented time. The alternative was not acceptable: that the Minister or his departmental staff unilaterally dictating local governance for First Nations in Manitoba, especially when it comes to leadership trying to keep our youth and Elders and all citizens safe from COVID-19.”

In late March this year, the AMC became aware of reports that First Nations were both implicitly and explicitly being pressured by federal officials to hold scheduled band elections in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Department officials indicated if a First Nation decided not to have an election in order to keep their citizens, safe, such an extension of the term of office would result in a “governance gap.” There were directives coming from Ottawa and the regions urging First Nations to continue to hold their elections, with suggested simple safety measures for COVID-19.

Grand Chief Dumas said “It was preposterous for Canada to expect First Nations in Manitoba to comply with unilateral directives, including directives on Band Council elections that would endanger and threaten the safety and well-being of First Nations citizens. During a pandemic, and otherwise, First Nations have the inherent right to act in the best interests and health to oversee any pandemic response on behalf of their citizens, the provisions of the *Indian Act* notwithstanding. I want to continue to acknowledge the good work of the Chiefs of Manitoba, their staff and their citizens for responding as they have to a heightening crisis.”

Grand Chief Dumas concluded, “Through the strong leadership of the Chiefs in Manitoba, we will get through this current pandemic to ensure that our Nations continue to strive and thrive and to take their rightful place in Canada as the signatories to our sacred and internationally recognized Treaties.”

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About the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

The AMC was formed in 1988 by the Chiefs in Manitoba to advocate on issues that commonly affect First Nations in Manitoba. AMC is an authorized representative of 62 of the 63 First Nations in Manitoba with a total of more than 151,000 First Nation citizens in the province, accounting for approximately 12 percent of the provincial population. AMC represents a diversity of Anishinaabe (Ojibway), Nehetho / Ininew (Cree), Anishininew (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.