



Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs
EMPOWERING OUR NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 2, 2020

AMC expresses grave concerns about the effects of the uncontrolled Keeyask COVID-19 outbreak on First Nations and the lack of Manitoba Hydro transparency

Treaty One Territory - The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) expresses grave concerns about the announced and continued COVID-19 outbreak at the Keeyask hydro generating construction site located in the shared Treaty 5 territory of several Northern Cree Nations.

Chief Doreen Spence of the Tataskweyak Cree Nation, Chief Leroy Constant of the York Factory First Nation, Chief Betsy Kennedy of the War Lake First Nation, and Chief Morris Beardy of the Fox Lake Cree Nation, along with MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee, are all calling on the province's Chief Medical Health Officer to declare the Keeyask construction site a code red zone and for Manitoba Hydro to immediately share detailed information on the outbreak with the project partner First Nations.

AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas stated, "When First Nations were originally informed of the situation at Keeyask, it was conveyed that there was a small outbreak and that it was being contained. Very little information was provided. It has now ballooned to an uncontrolled outbreak of 31 individuals. We still are not being provided with information. Our Chiefs were not and are not being given support, information or the resources that they require by Manitoba Hydro. They have been repeatedly denied this basic information to act quickly and this has now, frustratingly, become a growing and uncontrolled outbreak. It is completely unacceptable."

"I stand with the MKO and the Northern Cree leadership in their calls for the Keeyask hydro generating construction site to be declared a "red zone," and in their demands for more transparency on the outbreak from Manitoba Hydro," stated AMC Grand Chief Dumas. "With prompt and decisive action in declaring emergency measures, the First Nations leadership across Manitoba has until recently kept COVID-19 at bay. However, in recent weeks there has been significant spread to many of the AMC member First Nations across the province, including those located in MKO territory, as the province relaxed restrictions in order to open up the economy. As part of this reopening the province allowed workers from COVID hot zones to travel to the Keeyask construction site. There can be no doubt that the lax mitigation measures and the province's poorly planned reopening strategy has the potential to have a devastating impact on our Northern First Nations. Chief Doreen Spence warned of this scenario back in May as Manitoba Hydro recklessly resumed construction on Keeyask without consulting the partner First Nations and without taking into consideration the impacts of that callous decision on the surrounding First Nations, who neither have the access to healthcare, COVID mitigation resources, or to field hospitals that may be needed during a severe COVID-19 outbreak. Chief Spence's prediction and forecasting of this scenario has now come to fruition."

Grand Chief Dumas added, "it is entirely unacceptable that our extremely vulnerable First Nations have potentially been exposed to this deadly virus through negligence on the part of Manitoba Hydro. This is also a failure of provincial leadership, who have been less than effective in directing Manitoba Hydro and less than transparent with their own media briefings and in their sharing of information with Manitobans."

Grand Chief Dumas concluded, “First Nations leadership will continue to be hyper vigilant in the fight against the further spread of COVID-19 and our citizens will continue to diligently practice personal safety and prevention measures. As First Nations we will do what is reasonable and realistic within our homes to self isolate as mandated by our leadership and public health professionals, however, First Nations demand that Manitoba Hydro be forthcoming about the extent of the outbreak, with the testing data and numbers of workers currently on site at Keeyask. At present, we are still concerned about the testing and isolation methods Manitoba Hydro has implemented, as First Nations were not privy to said information. We, again, demand that First Nations be a part of the conversation and work together to find a safe and efficient solution.

In addition to sharing a total breakdown of the Keeyask numbers with the affected First Nations, AMC is also calling on the Manitoba government to release and use the federal funding that is intended to address COVID-19 within provincial schools. The government is asking for a partnership and a team effort in flattening the COVID-19 curve in Manitoba. First Nations as partners are more than willing to do their part, but the provincial government and the mainstream public must also do their part on their end to ensure that First Nations, who already have a highly disproportionate test rate, are protected as partners and as fellow Manitobans.”

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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.