



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs responds to Manitoba Hydro assertions in the media

Treaty One Territory, Manitoba – The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) expresses disappointment in Manitoba Hydro CEO Jay Grewal statements in the media. In a three page Manitoba Hydro press release, the Hydro CEO is quoted as saying that in regards to the Keeyask uncontrolled outbreak, partner First Nations have been consulted and have been involved in Keeyask COVID-19 mitigation and prevention measures, and that First Nations are making baseless arguments about the lack of a Manitoba Hydro COVID-19 plan. The AMC takes strong exception to these assertions.

AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas states, “The Manitoba Hydro CEO accusing its partner First Nations and their political representatives of being ‘irresponsible’ and spreading ‘misleading’ information is highly inappropriate, offensive and bordering on liable. I am calling on the CEO to retract her defamatory statements that essentially call the partner First Nations and the Chiefs liars as they attempt to work with Manitoba Hydro on preventing the spread of the virus into our highly vulnerable First Nations. I also call on the federal government to intervene immediately to completely shut down the Keeyask construction site as called for by 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 and Grand Chief Garrison Settee of the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO).”

For context, this current contentious issue follows a long history of Manitoba Hydro injustices to the First Nations associated with the Northern Flood Agreement (NFA). Aside from the NFA, there is currently an RCMP review stemming from the report of the Clean Environment Commission that found a long history of rampant physical and sexual abuse, racism and a lack of opportunity for First Nations associated with all the Hydroelectric construction sites throughout Treaty Five territory.

The Keeyask site itself was the subject of a report that found that the First Nations workers at the Keeyask site were repeatedly subjected to racism, harassment and abuse from Hydro workers since construction on the Keeyask Generating Station began, and that this provincial crown corporation allowed this to happen. The provincial government and Manitoba Hydro also fought its own public utility board in court and the Pallister government subsequently tabled and passed legislation that increased Hydro rates of First Nations.

Grand Chief Dumas added, “there is a long history of mistrust, systemic racism and economic injustices that must be overcome for First Nations to believe anything that the senior management of Manitoba Hydro says. The development and success of Manitoba Hydro, which has been the backbone of Manitoba’s economy for decades, has been at the expense of First Nations. To the extreme detriment of First Nations, the Pallister government also continues to use Manitoba Hydro as its cash cow.”

“Hydro’s approval of the PUB recommendation would have been a sign of good faith and facilitated a measure of reconciliation with First Nations. Instead, the Pallister government gave into Hydro demands that the special customer class be quashed through legal and legislative mechanisms. This is being done amidst a pandemic and with the onset of winter. First Nations not only have to deal with the spread of COVID-19 into their communities stemming from the Keeyask site this winter, they also must now somehow pay substantial increases in Hydro bills. Now, for the Hydro CEO to make the absurd and misleading statements to the media and to dismiss and downplay legitimate First Nations COVID-19 concerns is another knife in the back of First Nations. This is unconscionable. Hydro’s public stance is anything but reassuring and it doesn’t give any comfort to the affected First Nations. It doesn’t do anything to strengthen the relationship or to address the long history of mistrust, lost economic opportunity, and systemic racism. To this end, I call on Hydro’s CEO to retract her media statements and apologize for the grave disrespect of smearing First Nations leadership publicly,” concluded the AMC Grand Chief.

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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 / Inineew (Cree), Anishinew (Ojibwe-Cree), Denesuline (Dene) and Dakota Oyate (Dakota) people.