



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 17, 2021

## **AMC marks the one-year anniversary of First Nations actions on battling COVID-19**

**Treaty One Territory, Manitoba** – One year ago, on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020, First Nations in Manitoba officially began the battle against COVID-19. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) issues this statement to mark the one-year anniversary of First Nations’ actions and mitigation measures taken to prevent COVID-19 from entering First Nations.

Yesterday, on the eve of this one-year anniversary, AMC Grand Chief Arlen Dumas held a private commemoration ceremony at sunset to remember and honour those First Nations citizens lost to the deadly coronavirus pandemic. 151 candles were lit at the Odena Circle at the Forks during this reflection. It was a somber moment of contemplation and reflection in memory of all those we have lost and so dearly miss and a pledge to continue to fight COVID-19 and keep all First Nations citizens safe. (see attached for photos of the ceremony)

AMC Grand Chief Dumas said, “Even one First Nations life lost to COVID-19 is too many; however, without the leadership of the Chiefs and Councils, COVID-19 would have been far worse. Today we remember and honour the 151 citizens lost to COVID during the first year of the pandemic.”

“On the first anniversary of First Nations in Manitoba declaring a state of emergency due to COVID-19, I further offer my sincere appreciation to Chiefs and Councils for seeing us through these difficult times with their swift and decisive action to protect their communities and their people. While provincial and federal authorities were silent on prevention and mitigation, First Nations leadership was quick to act to authorize emergency measures to lockdown their Nations. The measures used were extremely successful last summer; however, with the second wave First Nations were hit particularly hard and continue to feel the disproportionate effects of the pandemic.”

“First Nation leadership and experts knew that First Nations on reserve would be particularly vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic and that, due to huge gaps in health services, sub-standard housing and economic disparities, they would be disproportionately impacted by the virus that causes COVID-19. This is why on March 17<sup>th</sup> 2020, through exclusive jurisdiction, they immediately enacted emergency measures to shut down borders and utilize emergency check points, while lobbying governments for needed resources. Data trends over the last year show that First Nation leadership was correct in their assessment and projections for effects of the pandemic. We have been disproportionately affected both on and off reserve and have lost too many citizens; but without the foresight of our Chiefs and the leadership of our health professionals, things could have been much worse,” added Grand Chief Dumas.

“We are not out of the pandemic yet – far from it. Even though vaccination prioritization is in place for First Nations, there is still great danger for a third wave of new COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC); we must remain vigilant as we prepare to go into a new season where we can hopefully one day safely gather together and celebrate our traditions and cultural customs under safe and appropriate circumstances,” concluded Grand Chief Dumas.

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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.