



# *Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.*

**Head Office**

Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation  
Nelson House, Manitoba  
R0B 1A0  
[www.mkonation.com](http://www.mkonation.com)

**Thompson Sub-Office**

206-55 Selkirk Avenue  
Thompson, Manitoba  
R8N 0M5

**Winnipeg Sub-Office**

Suite 1601-275 Portage Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3B 2B3

*Office of Grand Chief Garrison Settee*

May 19, 2020

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

## **Re: Urgent concerns regarding Manitoba Hydro and the safety of citizens in Northern Manitoba**

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

I am reaching out to you in my role as Grand Chief of Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. to express my urgent concern with the actions of Manitoba Hydro. MKO First Nations have been calling for the closure of the Keeyask construction site, run by Manitoba Hydro, since March 2020. The Crown corporation plans is working to bring in up to 1200 workers to the site starting today. Some of the workers come from regions such as Quebec or the United States, where rates of COVID-19 are high. Staff are also being brought in from British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

First Nations in Northern Manitoba are extremely concerned with the plans Manitoba Hydro has to bring in people from across Canada and the United States to the Keeyask construction site. I am disappointed that despite multiple and ongoing calls for action, Manitoba Hydro continues to ignore the concerns expressed by First Nations. We have called for a meeting with the CEO to no avail.

The Tataskewayak Cree Nation, Fox Lake Cree Nation, War Lake First Nation, and York Factory Cree Nation are considered as partners on the Keeyask project and yet they feel they are being completely ignored.

The Tataskewayak Cree Nation is less than 50 kilometres away from the construction site. They also have community members working at this site. Manitoba Hydro has *not* abided by public health measures since day one of the state of emergency in Manitoba. There is a lot of frustration with the way Manitoba Hydro has worked with our First Nations. The Tataskewayak Cree Nation is enforcing a lock down in Northern Manitoba, which started on May 14. This is stopping traffic from coming in and out of Keeyask. The community of 2500 people has been in lock down since March 29, 2020, to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus to their community.

The community is in an extremely vulnerable position. The roof of their school recently collapsed; the school was being set up as a quarantine and treatment site in case anyone were to be diagnosed with COVID. The First Nation does not have the infrastructure and resources to deal with an outbreak in their community. The blockade will help to keep COVID out of Northern Manitoba.

Yesterday, on May 18, the Fox Lake Cree Nation also began enforcing a lock down for their community. The First Nations issued a joint statement today to share their views on this situation.

Our First Nations leaders do not want to see a repeat of what is happening in La Loche, Saskatchewan. First Nations have done everything possible to protect the safety and wellness of citizens. We are asking Manitoba Hydro to reduce the work force and move the Keeyask project into “care and maintenance” mode for the time being to show respect for the lives of our First Nations citizens. We are also asking to meet with the CEO of Manitoba Hydro immediately.

Last week, Minister of Indigenous Services Marc Miller stated that the federal government will not get involved in this situation, saying it is a matter that needs to be raised with the provincial government. We have raised this issue repeatedly and yet we aren’t getting any satisfactory answers or collaboration. I am urging you to assist our First Nations in demanding that Manitoba Hydro delay plans to bring in up to 1200 people from COVID hotspots. The four First Nations who are partners in this project absolutely need to be at the table with Manitoba Hydro when such plans are being made. We must stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus to Northern Manitoba—if it comes to our First Nations, it will have devastating impacts.

Please have your office contact my assistant Clyde Flett by phone at (204) 390-2702 or by email at [clyde.flett@mkonorth.com](mailto:clyde.flett@mkonorth.com) to follow up on this urgent issue.

Sincerely,

Grand Chief Garrison Settee  
Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

cc: *MKO First Nations*  
*The Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health*  
*The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Indigenous Services*  
*The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown Services*  
*Premier of Manitoba, Brian Pallister*  
*The Honourable Eileen Clarke, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Relations*  
*Manitoba Members of Parliament*  
*Mr. Jagmeet Singh, leader, New Democratic Party of Canada*  
*Ms. Jay Grewal, CEO of Manitoba Hydro*

