



Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

For immediate release
January 27, 2021

MKO Statement on the Tragic and Preventable Death of Lillian Vanasse Resulting from Persistent Racism in Canada's Health Care System

Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB – Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing this statement responding to the tragic loss of Lillian Vanasse's life, who died in Alberta on December 26, 2020. Mrs. Vanasse is originally from the Sandy Bay First Nation in Manitoba.

MKO is demanding immediate change and actions to help the family begin a criminal investigation, hold the health system accountable, and prevent further loss of life.

Grand Chief Garrison Settee states:

"I am deeply pained by the needless suffering and horrible experience that Lillian faced in her final hours. I am expressing my deepest sympathies and condolences to Lillian's family, her husband Cory, and her entire community at this sad time.

We all grieve the loss of this beautiful life, which was taken too soon. Lillian is tragically one of several lives taken and stolen from us through Canada's racist health care system over the recent decades, including Joyce Echaquan in Quebec. These losses are a reflection and perpetuation of the colonial goal of residential schools—to "kill the Indian" and ignore and neglect First Nations. I will no longer accept this violence in Canada.

Racism is killing our people. We are suffering and at times being tortured as we are ignored, treated as secondhand citizens, and live in third world conditions. Our immediate health needs are not being met and this must change today—not tomorrow, not next year. It is a well-known and long-standing issue First Nations have raised over the generations into the deaf ears of governments, which are responsible for health care services for all citizens' well-being. This is an illegal and unjustifiable form of violence, killing our citizens prematurely. People and governments need to be held accountable.

There have been numerous inquiries, research studies, and commissions identifying and recommending actions to address the underlying factors that lead to systemic violence against Indigenous peoples in Canada—this includes the health care system. We don't need any more talk. We need action and commitment.

MKO will not wait for governments to change the health care system. We will continue to advocate strongly for the rights of MKO First Nations so citizens will have a voice and a champion. As such, we are taking immediate steps working with First Nation legal experts, medical scholars, and historians to fight the racism in our health care system and to hold those colonial systems accountable.

MKO also has a Client Navigator to help our citizens who face racism when accessing equitable health care. We demand to be treated with quality care, dignity, equality, and respect. Through Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin (KIM), we are also working on transforming the health system to improve health and wellness services as well as health outcomes for Northern First Nations citizens.

It remains to be seen if real actions come out of this week's national forum on "Addressing Anti-Indigenous Racism in Canada's Health Care Systems" on January 27 and 28, 2021, and also the development of the National Action Plan to respond to the Calls to Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

We expect the federal and provincial governments to work in full partnership in dismantling the health system and respecting First Nations rights to equal health care as well as self-determination over health care. Without partnerships and holding systems to account, we will continue to lose lives."

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