



## Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

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### **MKO Reflects on One Year of Living with COVID-19: Grand Chief Settee Honours MKO Citizens for Diligence Over Last Year**

***Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB*** – On behalf of Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Inc., Grand Chief Garrison Settee is issuing this statement to recognize the one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic.

***Grand Chief Garrison Settee states:***

“One year ago, we didn’t know much about the COVID-19 virus. We had shared a message encouraging First Nations citizens, saying that the risk of contracting COVID-19 in Northern Manitoba was low but increasing. We started promoting public health measures such as washing your hands thoroughly on a regular basis.

Northern Manitoba remained free of COVID-19 for six months. The first case in the Northern Health Region was detected in late September 2020. One year into the pandemic and we have witnessed multiple MKO communities successfully respond to outbreaks of the COVID-19 virus in their First Nations. I commend the leadership for their strength and devotion to keeping their communities safe.

Today I want to recognize many people who have been impacted by the pandemic. First, I send condolences to all those who have contracted the virus or who have lost loved ones due to COVID-19. I remember and grieve the loss of my own assistant and MKO family member, Clyde Flett, who passed away three months ago due to COVID-19. There have been countless other losses in our communities. Let’s continue to reach out and support one another as we navigate our collective grief.

While the pandemic has negatively impacted many of us, there have also been positives. Many families are thankful to have more time together as the pandemic has forced us to stay home, work from home, and limit our travel.

I have witnessed Indigenous health experts take the reins and provide strong and tireless leadership through multi-organizational partnerships such as the Manitoba First Nations Pandemic Response Coordination Team. At MKO, we have depended on staff at Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoayawin (KIM) Inc., our Northern health entity. KIM was only established in January 2020, and the entire team has risen to the challenge of supporting First Nations as the pandemic continues.

MKO thanks the multitude of organizations and partners that have supported First Nations in responding to the pandemic, including the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) at Indigenous Services Canada, Shared Health and the Northern Health Region on behalf of the Province of Manitoba; the Red Cross, the Canadian Armed Forces, and the Public Health Agency of Canada. I thank the organizations in urban areas that have provided support to MKO citizens who live off reserve. I also recognize Dr. Brent Roussin, Manitoba's Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, for his dedication and ongoing work in support of Northern First Nations as well as all Manitobans.

I personally have depended on many people to assist leadership as we move forward. I especially want to recognize Dr. Barry Lavallee, Kelvin Lynxleg, along with all staff at MKO and KIM.

MKO remains committed to doing all we can for the benefit and safety of Northern First Nations. In closing, I lift up and honour all MKO leadership along with MKO citizens. Your diligence and strength inspires me. I look forward to the day when we can once again gather. I certainly hope to visit your beautiful communities again in the future. Stay strong and be brave.”

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