



Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MKO Calls for Meaningful Partnership as Province Identifies Northern Manitoba as Economic Priority

Treaty 5 Territory, Opaskwayak Cree Nation - Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) acknowledges the provincial government's recognition of Northern Manitoba as a key economic driver in the Throne Speech, particularly through the Port of Churchill project, a multi-billion-dollar opportunity of national importance. MKO supports economic development in the North and recognizes that several First Nations are actively engaged in this work, including through the Arctic Gateway Group (AGG) Board of Directors.

While MKO welcomes this focus, we emphasize the need for inclusive planning and a robust strategy to address long-standing infrastructure and service gaps in Northern Manitoba. Grand Chief Garrison Settee stated:

"Economic development is important, and we commend First Nations who are leading and participating in these initiatives. At the same time, we must ensure that investments in trade and transportation are matched by investments in basic infrastructure and services for northern First Nations."

MKO is calling for immediate action on all-weather roads for northern First Nations, not as a benefit tied to economic projects, but as a basic collective and human right, long denied.

"No one should have to take a ferry or pay for a plane ticket for a basic medical appointment or to visit a sick family member," said Grand Chief Garrison Settee. "Our people deserve the same dignity and access as anyone else in Manitoba. All-weather roads are long overdue."

Infrastructure and Energy Priorities

This year, MKO urged the provincial government and Manitoba Hydro to release water being held back, which caused Split Lake and tributaries to drop to extreme lows, creating serious challenges for several First Nations. York Factory First Nation was forced to close its ferry service due to dangerously low water levels. These decisions highlight the lack of coordination and consideration for northern First Nations.

Several First Nations remain on diesel generators, with no plans to connect them to the main hydro grid. Meanwhile, the province is exploring a transmission line to Nunavut. MKO calls on the government to prioritize Manitobans first and ensure all First Nations have access to reliable power before exporting electricity.

Healthcare Disparities

The provincial government announced heavy investments and initiatives in southern Manitoba which is highly congested. To decongest urban health systems, the North requires investments to address shortages of doctors, nurses, and facilities. MKO acknowledges the addition of birthing services in Kinosao Sipi (Norway House Cree Nation), but more needs to be done to bring care “closer to home.” If we are all Manitobans, then the province must start looking North and provide meaningful partnership in planning and investment.

Funding for Families

As the number of First Nations children in care continues to rise, MKO is calling for urgent reforms in child welfare. Every child deserves to grow up safe, loved, and rooted in their culture. MKO urges the province to provide adequate funding and resources to make customary care and kinship arrangements a reality.

The province should also invest in specialized placement resources to reduce reliance on emergency placements and better support children with complex needs. Without targeted funding and coordinated planning, the current overburdened system will continue to put the safety and well-being of children at risk across Manitoba.

Policing and Justice

MKO continues to strengthen its Nation-led safety initiatives. Last year, three northern First Nations adopted a new intoxicants by-law, now enforceable by RCMP and First Nations Safety Officers. With support from the province, new airport scanners will help intercept opioids, weapons, and other dangerous substances before they reach our Nations.

Manitoba Crown-Indigenous Corporation

First Nation Chiefs carry a powerful vision; one of self-determination, justice, and prosperity. As the province begins development of a new Manitoba Crown-Indigenous Corporation to advance resource development, MKO insists it must respect Treaty rights and be built on true partnerships.

“First Nations are not just stakeholders, they are rights holders,” said Grand Chief Garrison Settee. “First Nations are central to Manitoba’s future.”

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Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. (MKO) is a non-profit, political advocacy organization that has represented 26 First Nation communities in Manitoba’s North since 1981. The MKO represents more than 72,000 First Nations people.