



Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc.

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MKO Responds to Federal Budget Vote: Economic Ambition Cannot Come at the Expense of Treaty Rights and UNDRIP Commitments

Treaty 5 Territory, Opaskwayak Cree Nation - Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) expresses deep concern following the federal government's approval of its "*Canada Strong*" Budget 2025. While the government frames this budget as a generational plan to secure Canada's place on the global economic stage amid trade wars and geopolitical uncertainty, MKO warns that these ambitions are being pursued at the expense of First Nations' rights and well-being.

The budget prioritizes nation-building megaprojects, industrial expansion, and resource extraction, positioning Canada as a competitive player internationally. MKO acknowledges the importance of economic resilience and diversification during this period of global instability. However, Canada cannot dismiss its fiduciary responsibilities, constitutional obligations, and its commitment to fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) while advancing these strategies.

"First Nations will not be sidelined or coerced into partnerships that ignore our Rights and priorities," said MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee. "Reconciliation must be built on respect, justice, and meaningful engagement, not on conditional investments tied to resource extraction."

Key Concerns Raised by MKO:

- **Cuts to Indigenous Services:** The budget imposes a 2% savings target on Crown-Indigenous Relations and Indigenous Services Canada, raising serious questions about maintaining essential programs.
- **Failure to Address Urgent Needs:** While investments in water infrastructure and housing are noted, there is no new funding for programs critical to northern First Nations, including policing strategies, MMIWG2S+ initiatives, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.
- **Conditional Economic Reconciliation:** Doubling the Indigenous Loan Guarantee Program to \$10 billion and expanding equity initiatives are welcome, but MKO cautions that these measures must not hinge on First Nations' participation in resource extraction projects.

Global Ambitions vs. Treaty and UNDRIP Obligations

Canada's budget reflects a heavy-handed approach to economic development, driven by trade disruptions and tariff escalations with the United States. While industrial policy and infrastructure investment may strengthen Canada's global standing, MKO stresses that Treaty obligations and UNDRIP principles are not optional, these are sacred commitments enshrined in Section 35 of the

Constitution and international law.

UNDRIP affirms Indigenous Peoples' right to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) on any development affecting their lands, territories, and resources. MKO emphasizes that this principle must guide all federal economic strategies, not be treated as a procedural checkbox.

“Every budget cycle that ignores Treaty and UNDRIP is another year Canada benefits from our lands while denying our children the safety and dignity that were promised,” said Grand Chief Garrison Settee. “Canada cannot claim to uphold reconciliation while cutting funding to the very departments responsible for delivering essential services to First Nations.”

As Canada positions itself as a leader in global trade and economic development, its credibility on human rights and reconciliation is under scrutiny. Failure to uphold Treaty obligations and fully implement UNDRIP undermines Canada's standing in the international community, where Indigenous rights are recognized as a cornerstone of sustainable development and justice. MKO reminds the federal government that true leadership on the world stage begins at home, with respect for the First Peoples of this land.

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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.

