



YORK FACTORY FIRST NATION

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BRIEF TO HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

RE: Resource Development and Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls

CONTEXT

Since the late 1950's Manitoba Hydro – a crown corporation – has regulated 3 river systems and constructed 6 generating stations in Ininiw territory in Northeastern Manitoba. This hydroelectric development powers the province of Manitoba and contributes to export markets, returning billions of dollars to the province each year through water rental and guarantee fees. The impacts of extraction fall on Ininiw lands and Ininiw peoples in northern Manitoba.

Resource development in Ininiw territory has had detrimental impacts on land, water, medicinal properties, animals, people, and culture. Ininiwak have witnessed and experienced issues of racialized and sexual violence, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia brought by this development - issues that fall disproportionately on community members, but more specifically, women and Two-Spirit.

60 years of resource development has left a profound sense of powerlessness and oppression in our community – an understanding that the projects will move ahead with or without our consent. This includes the most recent Keeyask Generating Station, in which YFFN stands to be a 5% equity owner.

Since 2019, our Nation has been calling for an inquiry into the racism, harassment, discrimination, and sexual violence in hydro-electric development projects in northern Manitoba. To date, there has been no response from government on this matter.

AN INCOMPLETE RESPONSE

As many have shared during the Standing Committee hearings, despite increased awareness and discussion, we have yet to see significant changes in lived experience in our community. In 2019, Manitoba Hydro provided a letter to Amnesty International listing measures that had been taken through the Keeyask Project to reduce or address racism, harassment, discrimination, and violence. We do not deny that some efforts have been made, but overall we can say the following:

- The project's impact assessment and mitigation measures were developed before Bill C69, and did not include gender-based analysis beyond, perhaps, with one of the four area First Nations;

- The proponent did not have staff who were familiar with Indigenous led approaches, trauma-informed approaches, crisis intervention and management, and, particularly, with gendered violence;
- Responses were, overall, not sufficiently Indigenous-led or culturally grounded; and
- Attempts to support a community response to problems stemming from the work site were very limited in scope and effectiveness.

Our members have returned from the Keeyask Project with increased needs for mental health, addictions, and social supports, and families are being affected. Health and social services in our reserve community are currently overtaxed, and our Council is consumed with responding to social issues.

Based on our experience, we believe it is important that resources for healing and support be available outside of a resource development project. Proponents may offer program funding as part of a mitigation strategy but cannot act as both the cause of and the response to violence and other issues stemming from resource development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Hold a Public Inquiry:

York Factory First Nation continues to call on the Provincial and Territorial governments to act on our calls for a Public Inquiry into the racism, harassment, discrimination, and sexual violence in hydro-electric development projects. These steps are crucial in the healing process. The work is needed:

- To build understanding inside and outside host communities, and to de-normalize the gendered violence;
- To understand the structural and systemic issues underpinning acts of racism, harassment, discrimination, and violence being experienced by Indigenous peoples, and in particular Indigenous women and Two-Spirit individuals;
- To understand gendered violence and its impacts;
- To help our people to speak and document their experiences, many of which have never been shared;
- To help our people come to terms with what they have experienced as a result of development in our lands;
- To overcome the inherent bias of proponent-led project monitoring; and
- To present recommendations specific to the cultural and historical context of northern Manitoba.

We need acknowledgement and apologies from Manitoba Hydro and the Province of Manitoba directly to the people in the communities – recognizing the harms that have and continue to take place in Ininiw communities and territories. Apologies alone are not enough, but they must be made.

Prevent Further Victimization and Provide Supports and Resources to affected People:

- Indigenous communities need to give free, prior, and informed consent to any resource development in their territories.
- Indigenous communities must have true governance authority within a project.
- Work camps must become safe spaces for all people who choose to work in them.



- Assessment and mitigation planning must include Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people, as well as staff familiar and well-versed in decolonized approaches, trauma-informed care and gendered violence.
- Indigenous advocates must be present in work camps to support individuals who experience abuses, large or small.
- An independent Indigenous advocacy body is needed to support those experience harm from colonial violence at and around project work camps.
- Independent Resource & Recovery Centers are needed at the regional level to support community healing programs and create safe places for Indigenous people to address problems and seek healing support.
- Provincial and federal health staff in Indigenous communities must be trained in Indigenous led approaches and cultural healing strategies. They must begin by making space for Indigenous worldviews and Indigenous Ways of Being.
- Indigenous communities need funding to develop and operate local-level programs that build cultural identity – through language, traditional practices, ceremony, and land-based healing. These provide the strength to address violence when it appears, and the resilience to recover from it.

Ensure Justice:

- Law enforcement must ensure a swift and complete response to all crimes and human rights violations in and around project work camps.
- RCMP must forge better relationships with remote Indigenous communities and increase responses to local incidents related to issues of addictions, mental health, and violence, which have been exacerbated in communities near resource development projects.
- First Nations need resources to develop strong local safety/constable programs. To be effective, programs need to be culturally-grounded, well-staffed, and well-resourced. Safety Officers need to be thoroughly trained in traditional intervention approaches, harm-reduction strategies, and trauma-informed care.

