



## **ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA CHIEFS SECRETARIAT INC.**

**Address by Grand Chief Dennis White Bird of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Secretariat Inc. to the Clean Environment Commission**

**Public Hearing: Manitoba Hydro - Wuskwatim Generating Station and Transmission Project  
May 13, 2004**

Tansi Commissioners.

I am Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. My name is Dennis White Bird, a citizen of the Rolling River First Nation. As Grand Chief I speak in support of the rights of First Nations in Manitoba, rights to our homelands and livelihood, to nurture our youth, support our elders and to ensure our future as peoples and nations.

Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation seeks to exercise those rights, as do all First Nations. I am here to support them. And the Executive Council of the Manitoba Chiefs support them through resolution moved by consensus on April 28, of this year. And I would like to read the resolution into the record.

“Motion number 2, decision reached by consensus at the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Executive Council of Chiefs meeting, held on April 28, 2004; moved by Chief John Thunder and seconded by Chief Ron Evans. That the Executive Council of Chiefs support the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation with regard to the Wuskwatim project.”

The Lake Winnipeg/Churchill/Nelson River project has had devastating impacts to First Nations and a way of life. First Nations had little voice in the decision to go ahead with this massive system of projects, little say in the future and no control over huge impacts to their homelands.

In the present context of environmental regulations, tribunals, entrenched treaty and Aboriginal rights, case law and First Nation leadership, the Lake Winnipeg/Churchill Nelson River may never have proceeded.

But nevertheless it did go ahead and affected all First Nations. And affected First Nations have been negotiating a way of life ever since - a way to exercise rights and to gain livelihood in a transformed economic and environmental setting. There has been compensation, but not enough to restore First Nations already impacted by colonialism and loss of livelihood.

Economic recovery is the imperative for all First Nations. I urge the Commission to give this due weight and consideration. Economic recovery is what Nisichawayasihk seeks, a future of economic independence, as do all First Nations. Nisichawayasihk should have that opportunity.

I respect the Commissioners for undertaking their serious mandate in assessing these projects, these proposed projects and making recommendations. I would encourage you to think in terms of making your recommendations to the citizens of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, the ultimate decision-makers on these projects, as they should be in the homelands of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation.

If Wuskwatim is a sound project, the Nisichawayasihk should have the opportunity to decide whether to proceed.

I commend Nisichawayasihk for the participatory process that they have followed in reaching difficult decisions in a trail-breaking venture, through a participatory process guided by the teachings and the great traditions of the Cree Nations.

Empowered with the decision on Wuskwatim, Nisichawayasihk will seek consensus through a participatory decision making process guided by the teachings and great traditions of the Cree Nation, as it should be in the homelands of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation.

The CEC hearings themselves have been an intrusive process that has placed First Nations in yet another adversarial multi-stakeholder forum. I encourage you to consider the impacts of this process in ways in which future project reviews and decision-making can be improved.

Nation to nation relations, guided by rights and the imperative of First Nation economic recovery, should be a standard for resource use decision-making in Manitoba. Past Hydro development has left a legacy of outstanding issues that must be addressed. Incremental decision making and project-by-project reviews do not address these broader issues.

I recognize that this goes beyond the scope of your terms of reference, but we need a broader forum. I hope that you will recommend that Government deal with the broader issues that you cannot address, but which are so evident in these hearings. Add your voice to the many commissions and courts that have called for modernizing relations to honour the original spirit and intent of our treaty relationship in contemporary terms. Add your voice to the call for correcting past injustices and address contemporary needs.

We to have an opportunity to pursue this with the assistance of the Treaty Relations Commission that the Crown of Canada and First Nations in Manitoba have jointly commissioned. I would encourage you to encourage honour for our treaties and honour for the Crown.

First Nations are not finished with Hydro or other resource users in our homelands. Resource revenue sharing and access to lands, water and resources are issues that need to be addressed and another area that the CEC might touch on. I encourage you to add your recommendations to those of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People which recognizes that:

“Before Canadians can expect to see an end to the enormous waste in human and financial resources that accompanies the economic and social marginalization of Aboriginal peoples, they must come to terms with a redistribution of this country’s land and resource base.”

And if Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation can blaze a trail in restoring sustainable First Nation economies, I congratulate them.

Meegwetch

Dennis White Bird