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SCO Grand Chief Lauds U.S. House of Representatives for Taking Action on Missing and Murdered Indigenous People

Time for the Government of Canada to take similar steps, says Grand Chief Daniels

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) Grand Chief Jerry Daniels is praising the United States House of Representatives for passing Savanna’s Act on Monday. The legislation is a bi-partisan bill that requires reporting on missing and murdered Indigenous peoples living in the United States.

“Getting to the roots of violence towards Indigenous people should never be politically motivated,” said Grand Chief Daniels. “I commend the elected representatives in the United States for coming together, in a highly partisan political era, to take meaningful action for the betterment of our relatives south of the border.”

Savanna’s Act is named for Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind, from Spirit Lake First Nation in North Dakota, who was murdered in 2017. She was pregnant at the time of her death.

“Unfortunately, Savanna’s story is all too familiar for us,” added Grand Chief Daniels. “The tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous people transcends all colonial borders and needs to be acknowledged and addressed urgently by all levels of government.”

The bill unanimously passed in the U.S. Senate earlier this year in March. Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski reintroduced the bill in March of this year, after former Democratic Senator Heidi Heitkamp proposed it in 2017 and it was blocked by the House of Representatives in 2018.

According to published reports by the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI), in 2016, there were 5,712 cases reported of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in the United States, but only 116 cases were logged with the Department of Justice.

Under the Act, the U.S. Department of Justice must provide training to law enforcement agencies on data entry, educate the public on that database, help Indigenous communities enter information in the database, develop guidelines for response to missing or murdered Indigenous people, provide technical assistance to tribes and law enforcement agencies and report data on missing or murdered Indigenous

people living in the United States. The Act also directs the Department of Justice and the Department of the Interior to consult with Indigenous Nations while developing national law enforcement guidelines.

Currently in Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has accepted the findings of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), and acknowledged the wrongs committed against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. However, the federal government has yet to take concrete steps to address the issues laid out in the National Inquiry's final report, and the 231 Calls for Justice, which includes a section on improving law enforcement practices.

Reforming law enforcement practices is key to addressing the epidemic of murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people. This week, a case to certify a MMIWG class action lawsuit against the federal government began in Regina. Allegations have been brought that the RCMP has done little to help First Nation families who's loved ones are missing.

"By legislating a duty to consult with Indigenous Leadership, the United States is taking a positive step towards reconciliation," concluded Grand Chief Daniels. "While I commend the Government of Canada for the MMIWG Inquiry, I now urge all Members of Parliament to immediately act upon the [National Inquiry's Calls For Justice](#) and to work together towards legislating positive change, as we have now witnessed in the United States."

Savanna's Act will now go to the President of the United States to be signed into law.

The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 Anishinaabe and Dakota First Nations that came together in 1999 to protect, preserve, promote, and enhance First Nations peoples' inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.

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