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SOUTHERN CHIEFS' ORGANIZATION RESPONDS TO COVID-19

Notice #1

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 13, 2020

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — As communities across the world have become aware of the health risks of the new COVID-19 coronavirus, the Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) and southern First Nation communities are taking precautions to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

"The health and well-being of our communities is our greatest concern," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "We will continue to work with the southern Chiefs and health authorities to ensure we are following the best health advice possible and providing the support needed to communities. Therefore, SCO is exercising an abundance of caution, and in consultation with its member-Chiefs, has determined it is in the best interests of its communities and the general public to cancel or postpone events planned in the immediate future."

While the Province has said it has reached out to First Nation leadership, the reality is many First Nation people are especially vulnerable to infectious diseases such as coronaviruses. Many factors contribute to this reality, including lack of housing, overcrowding, lack of clean water, limited health services and diminished ability for economic development. These are important issues that must be addressed.

Studies show a critical gap in health between First Nation and other Manitobans, as evidenced by a recent report on health status and access to health care from the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/health_sciences/medicine/units/chs/departamental_units/mchp/Landing-FNAtlas.html). The report documents an 11-year gap in life expectancy that is growing. While First Nation communities are diligently preparing with limited resources, they continue to work without adequate support and services.

As the situation evolves, Health Authorities at international, national, and local levels continue to monitor, gather information, assess risk, and respond. Public health officials are reminding us to frequently wash our hands, cough and sneeze into our sleeves, and to stay home when sick. Social

Representing Anishinaabe and Dakota First Nations in Southern Manitoba

distancing strategies are being recommended to limit the spread of COVID-19, although this is challenging in communities with chronic overcrowding. For the latest updates, please go to: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/coronavirus/>.

The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First Nations in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances 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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