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STATEMENT FROM SCO ON SILOAM MISSION

Colonial Approach Does Disservice to First Nation Clients

January 06, 2020

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) is expressing grave concern over the issues brought to light about Siloam Mission failing to provide and allow Indigenous cultural practices and spiritual care as part of its service to Winnipeg’s homeless community.

“I want to be clear in acknowledging that Siloam Mission provides critical and essential care to some of our most vulnerable citizens,” said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “However, as a humanitarian organization that relies on donations, volunteers, and government funding, Siloam needs to be accountable to the very people it claims to serve. First Nation citizens represent the population most likely to experience homelessness, yet we continue to be marginalized by organizations that exist to provide supports and services to homeless and vulnerable people.”

According to the latest Winnipeg Street Census Report, close to 66% of adults experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity in Winnipeg identified as Indigenous. When it comes to youth that percentage increases to 73.8%.

Meanwhile, published reports show that Indigenous culturally based programming and services at Siloam Mission that were previously available to First Nation clients have been either cut or scaled back. It has also been revealed that advocates and allies for these programs from within Siloam Mission have either been fired or systemically muzzled.

“Colonial history has shown time and time again that restricting spirituality and culture under the guise of helping people is destructive,” remarked Grand Chief Daniels. “It’s this history that resulted in a genocide over the last 500 years, including the devastation wrought by residential schools. The resulting intergenerational trauma leads directly to the increased experiences of First Nation poverty and homelessness today. The practice of receiving funding to provide services for First Nation people and then denying them culturally appropriate programming clearly shows what First Nations know all too well - that a colonial mentality still exists throughout many Manitoban organizations.”

Funding to support First Nation people who face homelessness should go directly to First Nation organizations to prevent our people from facing racism and colonial attitudes during their greatest times of need. SCO is calling for immediate systemic change at Siloam Mission.

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“As First Nation people we learn early on that all beings deserve to be treated with the utmost respect,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “The Chief Executive Officer and Board of Directors of Siloam Mission must commit to a holistic, culturally appropriate approach based on mutual respect in order to be viewed as a legitimate service provider and source of support by the majority of the people who access their services.”

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The Southern Chiefs’ Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,000 citizens 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.