

Head Office

Swan Lake First Nation 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

Winnipeg Sub-Office

1572 Dublin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4

Phone: 204.946.1869 Fax: 204.946.1871 Toll Free: 1.866.876.9701

www.scoinc.mb.ca Facebook: @SCOIncMB



SCO WELCOMES INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF AARON JADE ROSS WHILE IN POLICE CUSTODY

Family deserves to know the full truth – Grand Chief Daniels

July 1, 2021

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is heartened to learn that Manitoba's Chief Medical Examiner is proceeding with an inquest into the death of Aaron Jade Ross, a member of Bloodvein First Nation.

"First and foremost, I want to extend my condolences to Aaron's loved ones and community," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "I know this development will trigger painful memories, but it is a necessary step to understand the truth of what happened that day and to ensure accountability."

Aaron Jade Ross lived in Winnipeg, was proud of his First Nation heritage, and had a large, loving family, including seven siblings. When he was born, he suffered through a difficult birth, which caused complications for him throughout his life, though he persevered through them with dignity.

Though all the details surrounding his death are yet to be known, it's not clear exactly how his encounter with police resulted in his death. According a release from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, on September 23, 2019, Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) responded to a well-being call for Aaron Ross near the riverbank on the Assiniboine Avenue near Kennedy Street. Officers restrained him and emergency medical care was called. Aaron remained unresponsive despite resuscitation attempts to stabilize his condition. He was then transported to St. Boniface Hospital where he was pronounced dead seven days later, at just 27 years of age.

The medical examiner's office was notified and an autopsy was performed. The cause of death is listed as an anoxic brain injury due to complications of cardiac arrest due to probable excited delirium. Part two of the cause of death was the physiologic stress of struggle and restraint by police. The manner of death was undetermined. Many questions remain for all those who knew Aaron.

"I, my fellow council members and my community want this process to be thorough, unbiased and comprehensive," added Bloodvein First Nation Chief Derek Cook. "Aaron had such a tragic, untimely end to his life, and we need to know for certain what exactly caused and his death so his family have the full truth, but also so that such a tragic death can hopefully be prevented from ever happening again."

The inquest by the Chief Medical Examiner was called in accordance with The Fatality Inquiries Act.

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Under Section 19(5)(a) of The Act, an inquest can be ordered if the Chief Medical Examiner has reasonable grounds to believe that the deceased person died as a result of the use of force by a peace officer who was acting in the course of duty.

“It’s abundantly clear that our people continue to be grossly overrepresented in colonial justice systems, and far too often, interactions between First Nation people and law enforcement end in tragedy.” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “There are many First Nations citizens out there who are in need of compassion and help, not restraint and force. I pray this inquest will lead to changes in how law enforcement and the justice system as a whole can better care for those needing support.”

The date, time, and location of the inquest has yet to be determined by the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Manitoba. SCO will monitor the situation closely and will provide updates as soon as they are made available.

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The Southern Chiefs’ Organization represents 34 Anishinaabe and Dakota 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.

For Media Inquiries:

Al Foster, Senior Correspondent, Southern Chiefs’ Organization

Winnipeg Sub-Office: (204) 806-6837 | Email: Media@scoinc.mb.ca