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SCO DENOUNCES PALLISTER'S LATEST ATTACK ON FIRST NATIONS

Premier's COVID-19 Rhetoric Dangerous and Harmful – Grand Chief Daniels

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 4, 2020

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is joining the growing chorus of First Nation voices condemning the latest verbal attack by Manitoba premier Brian Pallister.

"This premier's emotional 'shoot from the hip' style is not unlike the current president of the United States," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "Instead of uniting Manitobans during a health crisis, Brian Pallister is purposefully sowing seeds of division and hate."

SCO is responding to statements made during the premier's media availability on Thursday, December 3, 2020. During that press conference, Brian Pallister said Manitoba's high proportion of Indigenous people means the federal plan to distribute COVID-19 vaccines based on population would leave non-Indigenous Manitobans with the least amount of doses in the country after reserving doses for First Nation communities.

"The premier needs to come to grips with how reckless and potentially disastrous his position is," remarked Grand Chief Daniels. "We are constantly working to unite people and bridge systemic divides, yet Pallister is prepared to dismantle years of work and relationship-building by resorting to a campaign of misinformation."

The latest statistics show consistent disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on First Nations. Close to 25% of hospitalizations and 40% of Intensive Care Unit (ICU) admissions in Manitoba are First Nation people, including those who live off reserve.

As of December 2, 2020 First Nation people living off-reserve make up more than 50% of new cases, 68% of active cases, and 72% of hospitalizations among First Nation people. They also account for 70% of ICU admissions and 64% of deaths among First Nation people in Manitoba. All of our citizens must be included in the Stage One priority group for vaccination, a prioritization that is needs based and should be uncontroversial.

"These numbers clearly demonstrate that First Nation people need to be prioritized, regardless of residence on- or off-reserve," added Grand Chief Daniels. "There really is no sugar-coating this."

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The premier's attitude towards vulnerable people speaks to entitlement and is not evidence-based."

SCO notes that since his inflammatory press conference, the premier has asked for a meeting with the Grand Chiefs from SCO, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) to discuss vaccination rollout in the province.

"I have no interest in meeting with a premier who race-baits and plays loosely with the inter-governmental relationships that directly affect the people I represent," concluded Grand Chief Daniels. "If Brian Pallister truly wants the input of First Nations, then I expect nothing less than a full public apology for the harm he caused this week."

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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.

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