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SCO STATEMENT ON ROYAL ASSENT OF BILL C-3

Our Women Deserve No Less – Grand Chief Daniels

May 7, 2021

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is acknowledging the passing of Bill C-3, which received royal assent last night. New federal judges will now be required to take training in sexual assault law, which will include content on rape myths and stereotypes, how systemic racism and discrimination factor into assault cases, and how to prevent racial, gender, and other biases from affecting their judicial decisions.

“Long overdue but very welcome news this week,” said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “In all aspects of Canadian society, First Nation women, girls, and gender-diverse people face disproportionate levels of bias, harassment, abuse, and violence, and this certainly includes within the justice system. We welcome all legislation and training programs that will make colonial institutions safer for all women and First Nation people.”

Bill C-3 not only mandates sexual assault training for new federal judges, it also requires judges to record their reasoning when ruling on sexual assault cases, which is critical. In Canada, it is estimated that fewer than half of sexual assault cases in adult criminal court result in a guilty verdict.

The historical inability of the Canadian justice system to effectively hold sexual offenders to account further affects Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people as they are more than three times as likely to experience violence than non-Indigenous Canadians, and are nearly twice as likely to be repeat victims of crime.

While the law only applies to new federal judges, it is available to sitting judges as well, who should be strongly encouraged to take the training. Similar programming should also be instituted at the provincial level.

“I commend our federal Treaty partners for finally pushing this bill through,” added Grand Chief Daniels. “Though it took four years, we are glad it has finally been made law. Now we look to our provincial Treaty partners to do the same. All judges across the country would benefit themselves and their communities by taking sexual assault and racial training. The Cindy Gladue case had to go all the way to the Supreme Court to highlight how important it is to have provincial judges trained in this area.”

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Cindy Gladue was a First Nation woman who was sexually assaulted and brutally killed in an Edmonton hotel in 2011. While prosecuting her case in Alberta, the state continued to disrespect Cindy, even in death, by preserving parts of her remains for the trial, as though her body amounted to pieces of evidence.

“Our First Nation women are sacred - they are mothers, daughters, sisters, Elders, healers, and leaders,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “My greatest hope is that this legislation will help judges recognize sexual assault and begin to put an end to the mistreatment and continued victimization by colonial justice systems.”

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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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