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SCO SEEKS ANSWERS AFTER SAGKEENG MAN DIES IN CUSTODY

Thorough and Impartial Investigation Needed in the Death of William Ahmo – Grand Chief

February 16, 2021

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) is calling for an immediate investigation into the death of a citizen of Sagkeeng Anicinabe Nation. 45 year old William Walter Ahmo was in custody of the Headingley Correctional Institute (HCI) at the time of his passing.

“I am deeply saddened and angered by the initial thoughts I have about how William was treated and ultimately how he died,” stated SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “Here we are, starting another week looking into how one our citizens has been taken from us while in the supposed care of colonial systems.”

RCMP officers were called by HCI on February 7, 2021, about an incident involving correctional officers that left William Ahmo seriously injured and unresponsive. He was taken to the Health Sciences Centre (HSC) where he remained under guard in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). William passed on a week later.

“There is absolutely no time to waste in this matter and we will spare no avenue that leads to answers and true justice,” continued Grand Chief Daniels. “Make no mistake, everyone from the staff at HCI to those providing care at HSC must provide clarity and be held accountable.”

SCO has a number of legislative tools at its disposal in this matter. Under the Fatal Inquiries Act, an immediate inquest must commence if the deceased person was a resident of a correctional facility. Failing that, a prompt inquiry must be conducted to determine the cause, manner, and circumstances of the death along with deciding if the death warrants further investigation. If it is determined that the fatality warrants an investigation, that process will commence immediately.

“At the very least, William’s family and friends deserve to know the circumstances that lead to the death of their loved one,” continued Grand Chief Daniels. “While we pause to share in their grief, we must also muster up the immediate strength to find answers and ensure this never happens again.”

According to published reports from February 15, 2021, the RCMP Major Crimes Unit, along with RCMP forensic identification and Headingley RCMP are conducting investigations.

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“If there is not a thorough, objective and completely impartial investigation that comes from this tragedy, then it will only further erode the already fractured relationship between the First Peoples of this land and the current justice and healthcare systems,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels.

SCO will do everything possible to support the family in this time of loss and grief, and they are close in our thoughts and prayers.

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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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