

**Head Office**

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

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**Winnipeg Sub-Office**

1572 Dublin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4

Phone: 204.946.1869 Fax: 204.946.1871 Toll Free: 1.866.876.9701

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## **SCO SURVEY ON POLICING FINDS OVERWHELMING EXPERIENCES OF RACISM AND VIOLENCE**

### **Vast Majority of First Nation People Report Experiences of Racism**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 9, 2021**

**ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB** — Today, on the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) released a new report on First Nation experiences of racism when dealing with police services across Manitoba.

"The survey report results clearly lay out what First Nation people have known for many years," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "A majority of our citizens face racism, and even violence and intimidation, when interacting with police officers that are meant to serve and protect them. While many police officers are not racist, it's clear that the issue goes far beyond "a few bad apples". We are talking about deep, systemic issues of racism within Manitoba's police services."

SCO's *First Nation Experiences of Racism in Policing Survey* was shared online over six weeks between February 25, 2020 and April 13, 2021. Seven hundred and forty-one qualified responses from First Nation people from 76 First Nations were received and they demonstrate how racism among police services in Manitoba is rampant, showing a pattern of prejudice, mistrust, intimidation, and even violence.

The vast majority of respondents, over 88 per cent, agreed with the statement: "Racism is a problem in policing in Manitoba." This assessment comes mainly from personal experience, with over 90 per cent of respondents reporting to have had at least one personal experience with police in Manitoba. These personal experiences, on the whole, have left a lasting impression, with nearly 53 per cent of respondents saying they feel *less safe* when they see police.

One respondent reported that *"If your skin color is brown you have no chance ... your[sic] guilty until proven innocent. They will even fight to prove you did it when you have proof, you weren't anywhere near the area."*

More than 70 per cent of respondents who indicated that they have personally interacted with police report experiencing racism firsthand and more than 81 per cent report that a family member of theirs has also experienced racism when dealing with police. One respondent shared that when they

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reported to police that their sister had been missing for a week, one of the attending officers said *“she’s probably just on a bender or maybe she’s sleeping it off somewhere.”*

In terms of expectations, the First Nation citizens surveyed reported low expectations regarding police in Manitoba, with a majority of respondents, almost 59 per cent, reporting that they either often or always expect to face racism when dealing with Manitoba’s police services.

Even more concerning, more than 66 per cent of respondents reported that they have actively avoided seeking help from police in Manitoba due to the effects of racism. Many shared that they have been treated as though they were the criminal when in reality, they were the victim of a crime and looking for help from the police.

*“WPS have always treated myself/family members as if I/we are the criminal/person committing assault when we are the victims/one who called them for our own safety.”*

Not surprisingly, First Nation respondents report low levels of trust in Manitoba’s police, with 65 per cent of respondent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement, “Overall, police in Manitoba are trustworthy”.

When it came to use of force, the vast majority of respondents, over 75 per cent, either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that police in Manitoba use force appropriately. Many shared stories of excessive use of force against them or a loved one, including Winnipeg police beating someone’s daughter and breaking her nose, as well as one First Nation citizen reporting that *“(o)ne officer choked me to the point where my feet were off the ground and I couldn’t breathe during the choking, the other officer punched me in the stomach where again I gasped, I couldn’t breathe...”*.

Others shared feelings of mistrust towards the justice system as a whole, and how the system is used to cover up violence committed against First Nation people. Eighty-two per cent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “Overall, police in Manitoba take responsibility for their actions.”

*“Police beat up Aboriginal people and the police officers charge the person they beat up for assault on a police officer. But the police don’t get charged. It is their word vs the actual victim. Police talk and get their stories straight and people have criminal records because of it. It’s so unfair and wrong... People in the justice system know it’s happening and it’s wrong.”*

These experiences have had significant impacts on First Nation individuals as well their communities and Manitoban society as a whole. Nearly 60 per cent of respondents report that their interactions with police in Manitoba have affected their mental health.

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*“One (police officer) violently pushed me, and the other grabbed me and dragged me. We were beaten, my baby son was traumatized. We all were. PTSD. I’m scared to ever call them if I need them throughout the years.”*

These negative impacts have even reduced First Nation citizen’s trust in Manitoba society as a whole, with almost 59 per cent of respondents reporting that their trust in Manitoba society, in general, has been affected by their interactions with police.

Survey participants offered key advice for police services and decision makers on how to improve and combat systemic racism in Manitoba’s policing. The top five suggestions were:

1. Increase Indigenous representation in police forces;
2. Implement mandatory training/education on mental health and Indigenous histories, traditions, and cultures;
3. Defund the police and invest in social wellness and community-based initiatives;
4. Increase screening requirements for police recruits;
5. Establish community-based and community-led policing initiatives.

“It is heartening to see that despite all the prejudice and serious experiences of violence, many First Nation people still offer solutions on how to fix Manitoba’s broken colonial policing system,” added Grand Chief Daniels. “It’s also not surprising that many of our people expressed pessimism at the thought that racism can be overcome in policing. This report should serve as a wake up call to our municipal, provincial, and federal Treaty partners to end centuries of racism in policing and justice, but this opportunity won’t last forever. Mistrust is growing and it is serious. We cannot wait any longer for real action.”

This report follows an analysis released last year which showed that since 2017, an Indigenous person in Canada is more than 10 times as likely to be shot and killed by a police officer as a non-racialized Canadian. It’s unsurprising then that mistrust, especially for First Nation youth, is growing.

“My son is (nine) and he gets nervous about the cops even though he knows he hasn't done anything wrong. Sad reality for our youth and our people.”

All governments must act now to establish a new policing model where First Nation communities, leadership, and policing and justice professionals have increased self-determination, and self-governance over their policing.

“I thank everyone who filled out this survey. Now that we have the final results, we can use them to help us build better systems and policies that actually serve and benefit our southern First Nations,” concluded Grand Chief Jerry Daniels.

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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.*

**For Media Inquiries:**

**Caitlin Reid**, Manager of Communications, Southern Chiefs' Organization

(204) 557-2399 | Email: [Media@scoinc.mb.ca](mailto:Media@scoinc.mb.ca)

[www.scoinc.mb.ca](http://www.scoinc.mb.ca)