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SCO LEADERSHIP OUTLINES PROGRESSIVE AGENDA AT LATEST CHIEFS' SUMMIT

We Need to Move Forward With Unity & Respect at All Levels– Grand Chief Daniels

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) has wrapped up its' latest Chiefs' Summit in Brandon, MB.

"These meetings are critical when it comes to setting our shared priorities, especially at the community level," stated SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "We need to have all of our Chiefs, Councils and community members come together in a spirit of mutual respect and unity. Then and only then can we be effective in our advocacy work and in establishing priorities."

One such priority is water quality in SCO-member communities. The Summit attendees heard first hand about the SCO Water Program including water quality testing and a resolution was tabled to establish a southern water authority. The governance structure of the authority will include Elders, Women as Water Keepers, and First Nation Youth. It also incorporates a two-eyed seeing approach, using both traditional and western knowledge.

"This is the kind of initiative that will truly lead to transformative change and it is one that I am particularly proud of," said Grand Chief Daniels. "Our water authority will be First Nation community centric and be completely self-determined."

The attending Chiefs had the chance to introduce, discuss and vote on a number of other important resolutions, including a directive given to the Southern First Nations Network of Care to develop a process and notice form to facilitate southern First Nation child welfare agencies to provide notice of Significant Measures taken in relation to our children and youth in care, to leadership and Indigenous Governing Bodies.

"What has been happening when it comes to child welfare in our communities, amounts to the equivalent of the Indian Residential School system," stated Sandy Bay Ojibway First Nation Chief Trevor Prince. "It is now time for us to take full control of our children's well being. A resolution such as this is a huge step in finally bringing all of our children home."

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Another important resolution was passed regarding a national response to the Sixties Scoop. At this time, there is very little in the way of supports for Sixties Scoop Survivors and their families.

“We have so many Survivors of this dreadful time in our collective history, when thousands of First Nations children were taken, adopted or placed with non-First Nation families,” said Lake Manitoba First Nation Chief Cornell McLean. “I support this resolution calling on the federal government to commission a national inquiry into the Sixties Scoop, along with demanding all levels of government provide long-term funding to support a First Nations Repatriation program.”

In the days leading up to the first National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, the Chiefs also passed a resolution calling for more long-term permanent funding for healing programs and other supports for Indian Residential School (IRS) Survivors. Last year the IRS healing programs supported more than 40,000 Survivors and their families in Manitoba. The healing programs serve residential and day school Survivors, as well as Sixties Scoop Survivors, however the federal funding has been at risk and on annual extensions for the last several years.

Finally, the Chiefs of the southern First Nations passed resolutions focusing on the proper licensing of First Nation foster homes, and on First Nation data governance.

“I am so proud of the compassion, diligence and strength that was on display at this gathering,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “We are collectively tackling very high level and difficult issues, and by listening to each other and working together, we will bring back to our communities what we have discussed and continue the work to creating positive outcomes for the people we represent.”

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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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