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SCO STATEMENT RE: HOMICIDE OF SAGKEENG MAN AT HEADINGLEY CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 24, 2022

ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) welcomes the findings of an investigation into the death of William Ahmo who lost his life while in custody at Headingley Correctional Centre. William was a beloved member of the Sagkeeng Anicinabe First Nation and died from injuries after what was being described as an incident with correctional officers.

“While the findings of this investigation can never mitigate the pain felt by William’s family, I am heartened to see that there will be some form of justice served in his wrongful death,” stated SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “When I called for an inquiry into William’s death, my goal was to create better transparency and trust for our citizens, to know that they or their loved ones will be safe when incarcerated.”

A Headingley Correctional Centre officer was charged last week with criminal negligence causing death and failing to provide necessities of life in William’s death last February. Before that, the Chief Medical Examiner had ruled William’s death was a homicide, triggering an investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Major Crimes Unit.

“To this day, I am deeply saddened and angered about how my community member was treated and ultimately how he died,” said Chief Derek Henderson of Sagkeeng Anicinabe First Nation. “William is just one of so many of our people, who have been taken from us while in colonial justice and health care systems. I can only hope this ruling results in real and transformative change when it comes to the treatment of incarcerated First Nation people.”

While SCO welcomes the ruling and subsequent charges being laid, the hope is that more clarity and accountability emerges from the investigation including details about the care William received while with paramedics and hospital staff.

“Long before and since the creation of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in 1988, we have witnessed countless examples of systemic racism in jails with deadly consequences for our people,” added Grand Chief Daniels. “As leaders, we must now do everything we can to ensure William’s death and those before him are not in vain.”

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The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 Anishinaabe and Dakota Nations and more than 81,000 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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