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SCO STATEMENT ON NEW INTERIM LEADER OF FEDERAL CONSERVATIVE PARTY

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is expressing concern over the recent election of Portage-Lisgar MP Candace Bergen as interim leader of the federal Conservative Party of Canada.

"On several occasions Ms. Bergen has exhibited questionable judgement and has chosen a path of division," said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "I call on conservatives to chart a course of reconciliation and to not further align with hateful elements of their party."

Just this past week, Bergen made troubling remarks related to the trucker convoy in Ottawa and other locations across Canada. She is quoted as saying, "Canadians are outside today, patriotic, peace-loving Canadians who are being called misogynists and racist by the prime minister," She added that "There are thousands of passionate, patriotic, and peaceful Canadians on the Hill right now, who just want to be heard."

When asked about the presence of Nazi symbols and confederate flags in the crowds, Bergen had the audacity to compare those incidents to demonstrations in Winnipeg when First Nation protesters and allies toppled symbols of the Crown including a statue of Queen Victoria. The statues were toppled in reaction to the discovery of unmarked graves of children near several former residential schools in Canada.

"To even think of drawing similarities between those two movements is disturbingly out of touch," added Grand Chief Daniels. "Now the person who is publicly stating that dangerous rhetoric is at the helm of this country's official opposition. I firmly believe the Conservative party has taken a gigantic step backwards by elevating Ms. Bergen into leadership, even if it is just for a short period of time."

This is not the only time Bergen has been publicly associated with racism. In January of last year, a photo circulated on social media showing her wearing a Make America Great Again (MAGA) hat. To many, the MAGA hat has become a symbol of racism and white supremacy.

"The Conservative party is entering into very dangerous and potentially divisive territory with Ms. Bergen's election," concluded Grand Chief Daniels. "I can only hope this is just a short-term move, and that the party will make every effort possible to elect a new leader who is committed to building positive relationships with all Canadians, especially the First Peoples of this land."

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The Southern Chiefs' Organization represents 34 First 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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