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SCO CALLS FOR REFORM AFTER ANISHINAABE WOMAN SUBJECTED TO RACISM AND ABUSE IN MANITOBA COURT

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is calling for sweeping changes in how courts handle racist and sexist language after an Anishinaabe woman was called among other things, a “rez dog” by a witness in her trial. The trial was held in April of last year.

“My heart literally sunk, when I heard those kinds of words being used in a court of law,” stated SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “How can you expect a fair outcome, when witnesses are allowed to use racism and misogyny as part of their testimonies.”

According to published reports from the court proceedings, the witness in question used several derogatory terms to describe the accused, including using the words “whore” and “slut”. SCO strongly condemns Manitoba provincial court Judge Samuel Raposo for allowing those comments to stand and that they were then used as part of the evidence in rendering his decision.

“This was not a case of presenting evidence in the spirit of fairness, this was a hateful diatribe by a witness,” added Grand Chief Daniels. “Language like this just feeds stereotypes about First Nation women and there is no place for this in any part of our public systems, especially in justice where our citizens are overrepresented and often subjected to overt racism.”

SCO is calling for an official complaint to be launched against Judge Raposo. SCO is also hopeful that Manitoba’s Chief Judge and the Human Rights Commission conduct their own investigations into what occurred during this trial. As judges are responsible for the conduct and decorum of their court rooms, it’s also important that they participate in ongoing anti-racism training to address internal, racial biases and receive intercultural competency training.

“I have been told that Manitoba judges are committed to reconciliation,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “This case presents an opportunity to put that promise into action. I will be watching very closely, to ensure, that respect and dignity are guaranteed for all people who enter into the justice system.”

This incident is not unique and is another reminder that much change is needed to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Calls to Action and the Calls for Justice of the National

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Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which called on the Federation of Law Societies of Canada and Canadian law schools to ensure that lawyers and law students receive appropriate cultural competency training. This includes skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

In July of 2021, the province announced it was transitioning the Indigenous Court Workers Program to Southern Chiefs' Organization and other Indigenous rights holder organizations. We look forward to hiring strong advocates who will support better outcomes for southern First Nation citizens who are interacting with the justice system.

Due to over policing of First Nation citizens, and systemic racism in the justice system, today 75 per cent of adults admitted into custody are Indigenous. In the last 10 years, there has been a 60 per cent increase in the incarceration of Indigenous men, and a 139 per cent increase in the incarceration of Indigenous women. Manitoba has the highest number of Incarcerated women in Canada and the highest youth incarceration rate in Canada.

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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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