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SCO ADVOCATES FOR SURVIVORS’ PRIORITIES FOR UPCOMING PAPAL VISIT

Time for concrete action on truth and reconciliation – Grand Chief Daniels

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ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB – With the Papal visit just days away, the Southern Chiefs’ Organization (SCO) continues to call for three key areas to be addressed by Pope Francis. The trip will allow the pope to apologize, in person and on Canadian soil, for abuses suffered by First Nation children at the hands of Catholic missionaries at residential schools. The Catholic Church was responsible for operating about 70 percent of the schools across Canada.

“For those who never came home, and to those who continue to carry the generational trauma of Catholic run Indian Residential Schools, I promise to use whatever tools I have to hold the Pope and the church he leads accountable,” stated SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. “This visit marks an unprecedented opportunity to finally work towards reconciliation with the Catholic Church.”

One of the top priorities is for the Catholic Church to finally honour its commitment to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) that was negotiated back in 2006. In that agreement the Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and United churches agreed to each provide modest reparations. The Catholic Church is the only church not to honour its \$25 million financial commitment.

“Let me be clear, money does not equate to healing,” said Sagkeeng Anicinabe First Nation Chief Derrick Henderson. “However, given the trauma and devastation inflicted through the Catholic run residential schools, living up to an agreement it signed is the least the church should do. The Catholic Church is one of the wealthiest institutions in the world, and it may be time for a discussion about true reparation to acknowledge the harm that was done to children at the hands of priests and nuns and church staff.”

SCO is also calling for the Catholic Church to commit to fully releasing all records and documents associated with residential schools, including the recently discovered photographs at the Vatican, that may provide information to families and shed light on the deaths of children who were attending school at the time of their passing. The church should commit to repatriating the thousands of objects and works of art, some sacred, that were taken from First Nations and that now reside at the Vatican.

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“The full truth of the church’s wrongs needs to be known and any perpetrators of abuse and deadly actions must be outed,” stated Chief Lola Thunderchild of Canupawakpa Dakota First Nation. “Then and only then, when the truth is known, can we truly move to the next stages of reconciling our relationship with this religious body.”

Lastly, SCO is calling on Pope Francis to publicly denounce and renounce the Doctrine of Discovery. This doctrine was the colonial law that allowed land that was not populated by Christians to be declared “vacant” and then claimed. The doctrine was used as legal and moral justification for the dismantling and destruction of sovereign Nations in this Territory.

“I challenge all non-Indigenous people in what is now known as Canada, to put themselves in our shoes, and imagine what it would be like to have their lands, lives, and children literally ripped away, because this is what happened at the hands of the Catholic Church,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “The Pope’s visit must come with authentic and genuine acts of remorse along with concrete commitments to compensation that can be used for First Nation led healing programs that will truly help our peoples. Survivors deserve this, and they have waited long enough.”

SCO is launching a healing program for Survivors and inter-generational Survivors in the coming months, and SCO’s new Wehwehneh Bahgahkinahgoohn project to transform the iconic Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) heritage building in downtown Winnipeg will include a public memorial to the children who did not return home, and a place of commemoration to honour all Survivors.

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The Southern Chiefs’ Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 81,500 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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