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FOR GENERAL RELEASE

The Death of Joyce Echaquan: Anti-Indigenous Racism

Montreal. – After 400 years of living together can we not do better? Why do we know each other so poorly? On September 28, 37-year old Joyce Echaquan, mother of seven, member of Atikamekw First Nation of Manawan, died amidst dehumanizing racist insults in a hospital in Joliette, Quebec.

The Jesuits of Canada express our deep condolences to Ms. Echaquan's family and community. We also express our solidarity with Indigenous Peoples' frustration that systemic bias and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in Canada continues to be widespread.

While the horror and injustice of what happened to Ms. Echaquan must be recognized and punished, it was not an isolated incident in Canada. Many Indigenous people feel afraid to go to a hospital. This should not be. It is not only in health care that we find racist attitudes and practices. The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* in 1996, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in 2015, the *National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls* in 2019 and, in Quebec, the *Viens Commission* in 2019 all found the same thing: that racism and discrimination against Indigenous people in Canada is systemic, is based in our colonizing history, and can be found in the attitudes and practices of our institutions both in secular society and in our faith organizations. Furthermore, in 2016 the Canadian government declared its full support for the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), which outlines what respect for Indigenous Peoples and their rights should look like. After so many studies and after accepting an international standard for our behaviour, to say that anti-Indigenous racism is not systemic sounds naïve, politically motivated or willfully ignorant.

Racism is expressed outwardly in personal and institutional actions. Such practices are the result of a view of "the other" learned from colonial practices that subordinate and marginalize people different from the dominant group. To transform the places where the virus of racism lurks within us, especially those of us who are not Indigenous, we need to take active responsibility to

confront racism and to decolonize our attitudes and institutions. We need training and we need to adopt anti-racist policies, rules and practices, with consequences for their violation.

Above all, we need the help of Indigenous people themselves. We need to meet our Indigenous brothers and sisters. We need to listen to their voices and learn from their knowledge. As Pope Francis says in his recent encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti*, we all share “...the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice...”. Listening to the voices and wisdom of our Indigenous sisters and brothers has certainly expanded the horizons of the Jesuits and has helped us begin our own journey of decolonization. Many others have also been listening and have been growing in solidarity and partnership with Indigenous Peoples.

In a Facebook post the day after Ms. Echaquan died, Hereditary Algonquin leader T8aminic Rankin said, “We must all be ready together, and get in the same canoe, in the same direction, and let the river always bring us in the right direction.”

By giving each other space to breathe and to speak in our own voices, perhaps we can begin truly to live together, in a good way, respecting the Treaties that we have made.