

## President's Message

April 9, 2013

Understanding and protecting Métis identity is critically important to fulfilling the promise of our rights to self-definition, self-determination, and self-government. These, in turn, are the necessary foundations for building our Métis Nation Governments and for ensuring our Citizens receive the recognition, services and benefits properly belonging to the Métis People.

The Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF) has always taken the position that outside of our democratic representative governments, no one can speak on our behalf. The MMF is the voice of the Métis People's aspirations, rights, and interests. We took this stand in 1967 when your MMF Government was created, and again in 1983 when the MMF, as a founding Governing Member, established the Métis National Council (MNC).

Resolution No. 8, passed unanimously at our 2007 MMF AGA, exemplifies the connection between Métis identity and Métis representation. The Métis, as a distinct rights-bearing Aboriginal People, delegated responsibilities to the MMF. When consultation is required the MMF, as the Métis Nation's Manitoba Métis Community representative, must take the lead. Others cannot speak, act, or make claims on our behalf.

We also take the undeniable position that no one other than the Métis People can define our Nation or Community. I say undeniable because this position must never be defeated by actions, arguments, or decisions of outsiders. The courts, other governments, organizations, or individuals cannot tell us who we are. The Métis Nation's Manitoba Métis Community will always stand strong and united to protect our Métis identity.

We know who we are. We have the shared stories, fears, and dreams of our parents, grandparents and great grandparents. We are the descendants of a Nation that both struggled and prospered while facing success, failure, and oppression. Our acts of nationhood included the Battles of Seven Oaks, Grand Coteau, Fish Creek, Duck Lake, and Batoche as well as the Sayer Trial and the Red River Resistance.

In 1983, when we created the MNC, the MMF, along with our two Prairie Métis Government counterparts, affirmed we are a unique and distinct Aboriginal People. At that time, we drew a map of our Ancestral Homeland. This was the historic Northwest, the heartland of west central North America, protected by our Leaders Grant, Dumont, Riel, Goulet, Bruce, Lepine, Lagimodiere, and many others over many decades.

In 2002, the MNC General Assembly adopted the national definition of Metis we use today. Immediately afterwards, our MMF Annual General Assembly unanimously accepted this definition and made constitutional amendments to include it as Article III of our MMF Constitution. I recommend that you visit our MMF website to review this foundational document.

By our definition, Métis means "a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation." Further, the Historic Métis Nation means the Aboriginal people then known as Métis or Half-Breeds who resided in the Historic Métis Nation Homeland.

Important to using this definition is to understand the scope of the Historic Métis Nation Homeland. Consistent with our position taken back in 1983, the MNC and MMF define this as "the area of land in west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-Breeds as they were then known."

Unfortunately, by abusing language, manipulating geographic terms, ignoring evidence, and denying the stories of our Ancestors, the concept of our Homeland was stretched and our Nationhood weakened. There are those who believe our Nation and Homeland goes across Ontario into Quebec and, for some, all the way to the East Coast of Canada. This is the theft of our Métis history and Métis identity. This is clearly wrong.

At our recent March 2013 MNC General Assembly, we passed an important resolution that says just that. The resolution states there is only one Métis Nation and the Métis Nation Homeland is "the historic Northwest which entered into confederation in 1870 through the negotiations of the Métis Provisional Government led by President Louis Riel" and clarifies that "west central North America," means historic Northwest.

We are at a crucial moment in our history. We are proudly and intensely protective of our families and communities. This MNC resolution re-affirms our belief in one strong Métis Nation. It also provides support for our bargaining positions at a variety of negotiating tables and a solid foundation to build upon the hard work and sacrifices of our Métis Ancestors for the future of our children and grandchildren.

I offer a prayer for our Ancestors and give recognition for all they have done for our benefit. I also offer my prayers for all those who have passed away and condolences to friends and family of our departed. Best wishes to all.

Believe in Yourself - Believe in Metis  
Meeqwetch,

President David Chartrand, LL.D