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Le Metis President's Message

This past week the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Professor James Anaya, completed his visit to Canada. I am pleased the Manitoba Metis Federation was able to host the Special Rapporteur and Metis National Council President Clément Chartier while they were both in Winnipeg – the Birthplace of the Métis Nation and the Heart of our Homeland.

I was not able to attend this year's Special Rapporteur visit and present our briefing. I thank Southeast Region Vice President Denise Thomas, who welcomed and hosted the Special Rapporteur in my place and Winnipeg Region Director Claire Riddle who also attended on behalf of the MMF. I also thank our dedicated staff who worked long and hard hours to organize the event and make our presentation.

At the Special Rapporteur visit we showcased our Metis traditional culture including food such as bannock, bison stew, pickerel, and bread pudding, as well as cultural entertainment. I thank Elsie Bear's Kitchen for preparing the meal, the Classic Country Review for the music, and the Metis Prairie Steppers from Portage La Prairie for their dancing presentation. I hear it was awesome and we are all proud.

The purpose of the Rapporteur's visit was to gather information and provide recommendations on the conditions and relationships between the Indigenous Peoples and governments in those visited countries, or "states" as they call them on the international scene. His written report on this visit will be submitted to the UN Human Rights Council next year in September 2014.

Recently in our March 2013 Supreme Court of Canada MMF Land Claim victory, the Metis were recognized as an Indigenous People. This is supported by our 1982 inclusion as an Aboriginal People in the Canadian Constitution. While here the Special Rapporteur looked at issues faced by the Metis. He had a keen interest in reconciliation, governance and self-government, lands and resources, and health, education, and, of course, economic development.

The task of the Special Rapporteur is to identify and promote best practices. It is through his report and recommendations that he seeks to encourage new laws, government programs, agreements between Indigenous Peoples and countries such as Canada, and other reforms. He cannot force these to happen but he uses international standards like the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and public forums to either praise or prod countries based their record.

The Metis are successfully moving forward in economic and business development. There is much Canada can do to assist. In our brief, we recommended that Canada make strategic investments to provide further loan and equity capital, strengthen

our economic institutions, increase funding for education and training, and ensure there are Impact and Benefit Agreements (IBAs) in place to ensure Metis participation in major economic and natural resource development projects on our traditional lands.

This was not the first time a UN Special Rapporteur has visited the MMF. Back in 2004 the previous Rapporteur, Dr. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, came to see us. His subsequent 2005 report stated that: "Métis land claims have not been dealt with in any significant way." Among his recommendations he stated: "Métis outstanding land claims have been neglected over the years and should be addressed as an urgent priority."

Since that report's publication, the MMF has made successful advancements in the courts. As you know, it was in 2006 that we started our second ascent to the Supreme Court of Canada. We received our legal victory there this year in March 2013. It is now time for Canada to negotiate with us an MMF Land Claim Agreement to resolve this outstanding constitutional grievance and unfinished business of Confederation.

When negotiating a resolution to our MMF Land Claim, we must always consider how it will contribute to our people's future goals and aspirations as well as how to reach their dreams of personal and family success. We must continue to build a legacy for future generations. Social and economic development will always be important in building the legacy.

I recently gave a presentation at the World Indigenous Business Forum in Windhoek, Namibia. While there I spoke about the importance of economic development and inter-indigenous trade. Our Metis culture reflects our commercial trading and entrepreneurial roots. We were Canada's original free traders. This event and others throughout the Americas and around the World are important in attracting investment and developing partnerships.

In a future message I will go into more detail about moving forward with our economic rights and interests at all levels: local and regional, national, and international. The MMF will continue to pursue development in all areas, following all avenues, and using all means available to us as the Metis Nation's Manitoba Metis Community.

In developing partnerships, and challenging arbitrary laws and unfair monopolies, as well as seizing employment and business opportunities, we must always remember Louis Riel Sr.'s famous declaration following our successful 1849 Guillaume Sayer free trade trial: "Le commerce est libre! Vive la liberté!" – "Trade is free! Live freedom!"

Meeqwetch,