

President's Message

July 2, 2015

The province has apologized for their part of the 60s Scoop, but I cannot help but wonder what the apology really means for the Metis people. At no point during the lead up to this apology did the government reach out to the Manitoba Metis community and consult with them about the impact the Adopt Indian Metis program on Metis children and families. The NDP government says they met with representatives of the three indigenous groups over a year ago. I can tell you with certainty the government did not meet with any MMF representative. The Manitoba Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs did not consult with the Metis about this apology.

As a matter of fact, we were unaware of any apology until a reporter from The Canadian Press broke the story the week prior the apology. When we read about what the government was planning, we immediately contacted them to ask what it was all about. The people we spoke to did not know what was happening either! It was three hours later that we received any information from the government about the apology. We received a general email invitation with a graphic of a feather – a First Nations symbol – that stated the government was going to honour 60s Scoop survivors. There was no Metis symbol used on the email graphic. Based upon what was sent to our office, it could only be assumed the event was for First Nations people exclusively. There was nothing indicating the Metis were to be included or acknowledged.

And then there was the event itself. I was never officially invited to this apology. The Premier's office told the media that they sent an official invite by letter. I had my people turn the building upside down looking for that alleged letter. We could not find it!

I watched the live video of the ceremony at the Rotunda. At no point did the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs mention the Metis. There was no visible Metis representation. There certainly was an abundance of First Nations symbols and ceremony. In all appearances, the government was apologizing to the First Nations people but completely ignoring the terrible impact the 60s Scoop had on Metis families.

Just before the event took place, my staff received an email asking if I was going to be there. The email said there would be two passes reserved for me at the security desk at the Legislature if I wanted to come. I arrived at the Legislature before the planned apology and picked up my passes. The passes I received were for general gallery seating. However, First Nations representatives received special passes granting them seating in the Speakers Gallery. The Metis were not afforded the same level of respect from the government as members of the First Nations community. As the President of the Manitoba Metis Federation and the democratically elected leader of the Metis people in Manitoba, I find this offensive and disrespectful to the Metis Nation.

It is fair to point out that the apology that was read in the Legislature acknowledged the province's role in the theft of our Metis children, the loss of their identity, culture and the loss of their families. However how this apology came about is completely unacceptable. I have written the Premier expressing my disappointment at being ignored in this process. I also let him know the Metis are willing to engage the province as it develops the next steps and plans to address this horrific time in history.

Understand this – the Metis people cannot be satisfied with just words. The effects of that terrible time are profound and the effects on our Metis families cannot be easily reconciled. In order for true reconciliation between the Metis people and the Crown to take place, there must be very real and meaningful discussion that not only recognizes the wrong but also seeks to make restitution for the ripping apart of our Metis families and the robbery of our children's true heritage and identity.

As I said in my last message to you, the Manitoba Metis Federation will not let these injustices slide. We will keep pushing until every last one of our lost children are found and families are reunited and healed.

I want to congratulate Elder George Fleury on being inducted at the recent Keeping the Fires Burning gala. Elder Fleury was recognized for his life's work and contribution in building our Metis community, restoring wellness and prosperity in our lives. I also want to congratulate Elder Esther Ducharme for her recent appointment to the Mayor's Indigenous Advisory Circle in Winnipeg. We are proud of our Elders and the wisdom they share with us. Their examples lead us forward and enrich our community.

In closing I offer my hopes for our Metis people who are sick and shut in. I also offer my prayers for those who have departed and my condolences to their family, friends and neighbours. My best wishes to all.

Meeqwetch,