

President's Message

Our March 2013 MMF Land Claim victory at the Supreme Court of Canada remains foremost in the minds of the Métis people. When I travel throughout Manitoba and, indeed, across the Métis Nation, everyone wants to know the status of our claim. We remember clearly the Supreme Court vindication of our long struggle for justice. That was a great start in moving forward and I offer an update.

As you will recall, the Supreme Court reaffirmed that Section 31 of the Manitoba Act set aside 1.4 million acres of land to be given to the Métis children. This is a constitutional obligation engaging the honour of the Crown to give the Métis children a “head start” over the expected influx of settlers from the east. This solemn promise was not kept. The Court held that this promise had not been implemented “in accordance with the honour of the Crown.” This has been called the unfinished business of Confederation.

The Métis are the Founders of Manitoba. We are also Canada's Negotiating Partner in Confederation. I have said before, here and elsewhere, that Canada left the negotiating table back in the late 1800s and didn't fulfill what had been promised. Now, with our victory, various independent recommendations, and a commitment by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, we are confident Canada will finish the business of Confederation, right the wrongs and create a legacy for our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

To quote again the Supreme Court: “So long as the issue remains outstanding, the goal of reconciliation and constitutional harmony, recognized in s. 35 of the *Charter* and underlying s. 31 of the *Manitoba Act*, remains unachieved. The ongoing rift in the national fabric that s. 31 was adopted to cure remains unremedied. The unfinished business of reconciliation of the Métis people with Canadian sovereignty is a matter of national and constitutional import.”

Please take some time to read the MMF decision. You can find a copy of it at our MMF website on our Land Claim webpage. Go straight to <http://www.mmf.mb.ca/wcm-docs/docs/metis-scoc-judgment-march-8-2013.pdf> to see the court's decision. You will find other relevant information on the webpage including documents, video, and links to other sites. If you don't have Internet access, please call the MMF Home Office and we will make arrangements to assist you in getting more information.

Canada understands the importance of bringing this unfinished business to completion. The Ministerial Special Representative Douglas Eyford in his February 2015 independent report, called *A New Direction: Advancing Aboriginal and Treaty Rights*, made the recommendation calling on Canada to “establish a framework for negotiations with the Manitoba Metis Federation to respond to the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Manitoba Metis Federation v Canada* 2013 SCC 14.”

Following this clear and straightforward recommendation, the federal government appointed Mr. Tom Isaac “to explore ways to advance a dialogue on reconciliation with Métis in Manitoba in response to the 2013 *Manitoba Metis Federation et al. v. Canada* decision [...]” As per his mandate, the MMF met with Mr. Isaac back in June 2015 over a three-day period – making presentations to share with him the MMF governance structure and to discuss our perspectives. Although appointed

by government, his reporting is arms-length and independent. We look forward seeing to his report in the New Year.

The world is now watching Canada's next moves. In 2014, after an MMF presentation to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples, James Anaya in his international address stated clearly that Canada must resolve Métis claims. He wrote Canada must undertake "active measures to develop a procedure for addressing outstanding Métis land claims, to avoid having to litigate cases individually, and enter into negotiations [...]."

Liberal Party Leader, now Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, no stranger to the Métis people, understands the need for the negotiations. At our 2013 Annual General Assembly, he made a welcome video announcement to nearly 3,000 delegates, saying, "The courts have provided much-needed clarity around your long-standing land claim. Now the federal government must sit down and, nation-to-nation, negotiate in good faith to reach a fair and equitable resolution to this historic injustice. And, I commit to you if this government does not, my government will."

Clearly there is energy and momentum to move our MMF Land Claim towards resolution. In the Liberal election platform, *Real Change: Advancing and Achieving, Reconciliation for the Metis Nation*, the new Government renewed its commitment to "immediately establish a negotiations process between Canada and the Manitoba Métis Federation in order to settle the outstanding land claim of the Manitoba Métis community, as recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada in *Manitoba Métis Federation v. Canada (AG)*."

Over a hundred and forty-five years have passed since the Métis agreed to bring our traditional homeland into Confederation. Over the same period we demanded justice. It is now time for negotiation and reconciliation. It is now time for the Partners in Confederation to take the next steps together into a renewed partnership. We are prepared to take those steps.

I offer my prayers for our friends and family members who have passed on and my condolences to those who have lost a loved one. My hopes are with those who are sick or shut in and I offer my best wishes to all.

Meeqwetch,