

President's Message

June 2, 2016

Sunny days are on the way for the Métis Nation. Already this year we have witnessed the results of well fought battles we have embarked upon as a Nation. In February the Supreme Court of Canada ruled the Federal Government has a jurisdictional and constitutional responsibility for the Métis Nation in its landmark decision on *Daniels v. Canada*. And last week we welcomed Canada – our negotiating partner in Confederation – back to the table as we signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the crucial first step in achieving renewal and reconciliation with Canada.

This MOU will lead to a framework in which we can finally do the noble work of settling our 146-year quest for justice on being robbed of our inheritance. We will have a modern day treaty with Canada that permit us to set the course for our Nation's future for the betterment of our children, their children and the generations that follow.

I am reminded once again of the AGA after the 2013 Supreme Court of Canada decision on our land claim. When I brought the good news back to our people and asked them how they would like to proceed, all 3000+ delegates unanimously said we want to place any money and lands we receive into a trust for our children and future generations. This direction of our Métis Citizens means our families will no longer ask "Can I afford to send my children to University?" the question will now be "Which University do you want to attend?" This will be a major accomplishment!

Many people have fought hard for this day to come. Sadly, some are no longer with us. Yet, it was their efforts, their commitment to the Métis Nation that has brought us to this moment in time where we can see the path to a brighter future for our Citizens shining before us.

Our struggle has not only been historical when we stood with the Métis leader – the Warden of the Plains – Cuthbert Grant in 1816 and raised our Métis Flag in defiance against an oppressive proclamation. It did not end with the Sayer trial in defiance of a HBC monopoly that sought to impoverish our people and prevent them from trade goods in support of their families. It did not end when Louis Riel and his government fashioned the List of Rights that formed the framework for the *Manitoba Act, 1870* – Canada's Treaty with the Métis.

Our treaty supersedes Treaty 1 by fourteen months. Our Treaty was not honoured and our people were robbed of their rights and chased from their lands. Our struggle continued with Riel leading a resistance against the aggression of our partner in Confederation. It did not stop when – as Sir Wilfred Laurier so aptly put it – the judicial murder of Riel was carried out.

No my friends, our struggle continued to modern memory. During the MOU Signing Ceremony last week, Métis Elder George Fleury recounted how the mounted police and the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Association shot the animals, burned the houses and church in Ste. Madeline to make this Métis settlement a cow pasture.

Despite serving in Canada's two great wars, our Métis veterans were not welcomed back home as equal partners and patriots – despite standing for Canada and against oppression on the world stage. No, our veterans returned home and continued the fight against inequality and oppression.

Even when Harry Daniels and the Métis negotiated the recognition of the Métis in the Canadian Constitution in 1982, we were told this recognition was nothing more than an empty promise. Governments at that time said the recognition meant nothing – it was an empty box.

So we continued the fight in the courts. In 2013 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled the federal Crown failed to implement the land grant provision set out in s. 31 of the *Manitoba Act, 1870* in accordance with the honour of the Crown. In its decision, the Court described this grievance as an “ongoing rift in the national fabric.”

Our Métis Nation was born in struggle. And we will continue to fight until the last right is secured and each Métis Citizen is assured of their future and has received their long awaited inheritance.

I am proud of our new Prime Minister. He promised us at our AGA in 2013 that he would settle our land claim. Again in the lead up to the 2015 federal election he reaffirmed his commitment in writing to settle the land claim if he formed government. Once elected, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau began making good his promise to the Métis Nation when he issued a mandate letter to the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. The very next day after being sworn in, Minister Bennett called me at my home and asked me if we could begin the work of reconciliation.

Our federal government, under Prime Minister Trudeau and through the leadership of Minister Bennett, met with us last week – Nation-to-Nation – and signed the MOU that will embark us upon a journey of partnership renewal and reconciliation with Canada.

This is the start of sunnier days for the Métis. I made you a promise when I was first elected that I would bring us here and see us through. I reaffirm my commitment and resolve to you to negotiate a strong, fair and beneficial modern day treaty with Canada on behalf of you – our Métis Citizens.

In closing, I offer my best wishes for those who are sick or shut-in. May they be blessed with healing, health, and peace. I pray for and share my heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathies for all our neighbours, friends, and families who have lost loved ones. May they be comforted during this difficult time.

Meeqwetch,