

President's Message

November 24, 2016

This is a monumental and historic time for Manitoba's Métis. After more than 140 years, three decades of court battles and numerous consultations with our Métis Citizens, we have signed a Framework Agreement with Canada that will start the formal negotiations leading to the reconciliation of our constitutional grievance and the renewal of the solemn promise.

The jointly developed Framework Agreement signed in Ottawa on November 15th sets out the process and subject matters for formal reconciliation negotiations to address the outstanding issues raised in the 2013 Manitoba Metis Federation v. Canada decision of the Supreme Court of Canada.

During a brief signing ceremony, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, said Canada was returning to the negotiating table in a spirit of renewal. In her remarks, she said, "This is a truly historic undertaking and we are firmly committed to working in partnership to reach a balanced solution that advances reconciliation for everyone's benefit."

After signing the Framework in Ottawa, I immediately caught a flight home so I could present this signed Agreement to Louis Riel, and Manitoba's Métis, on the 131st anniversary of his judicial murder. During our annual November 16th gravesite ceremony to celebrate the Life and Legacy of Louis Riel, spirits soared as we stood before his grave. As Canada's Negotiating Partners in Confederation and the Founders of Manitoba, this was an especially auspicious day of celebration for Manitoba's Métis.

In recognition and in honour of Louis Riel, the Canadian Government for the first time ever raised and flew the Métis Nation flag on Parliament Hill. Vice President Denise Thomas and Métis Elder George Fleury were on hand for this historic moment. Métis fiddler Taylor Fleming also played for those gathered as the flag was lifted. This has been truly a momentous week for the Métis. We are all very proud of the progress we are making as a people and as a Nation.

During our celebrations of the signing of our Framework Agreement with Canada, I told the staff and Board of the MMF the next phase of our noble work begins in earnest. Now that we have this Agreement in place, formal negotiations have begun. These negotiations will see us finally secure the lasting place that was promised to our children over 140 years ago. As is my tradition, before presenting the Framework Agreement, I spent time in the Cathedral to say prayers of thanksgiving and to ask for wisdom for the Government of Manitoba's Métis. We have come far, but there is still far to go. We must not let up. We must not quit now. The horizon is bright with possibility and opportunity. We must do all that we can to secure what is rightfully ours.

Among the subject matters we will be negotiating are building and supporting Métis self-government; creation of a 'lasting place' trust for our Citizen's future; supporting a healthy, secure and prosperous Manitoba Métis community; as well as land related issues such as possible selection and management of settlement lands; conservation management; resource development and management; and strategic economic development. These are just a few areas that we will be negotiating. From these subject matters we can see such benefits as having better access to healthcare; increased access to education; and economic development opportunities. From the

trust we will build, we may see such things as opportunity to help our children secure a down payment on a home and assistance for our Métis Citizens in accessing sustainable and appropriate housing. These are just a few areas that we anticipate negotiating.

As was the case with our community consultations leading up to the finalization and signing of our Framework Agreement, we will continue engaging with Métis so what we negotiate is reflective of what you want and need. With this signed Framework Agreement, we will engage our Métis Citizens and Canada through a results-oriented process that will see reconciliation of the solemn promise and the development of a modern-day treaty with Canada.

Friends, this is a great time to be Métis. I want to encourage you once again, if you have not finalized your Métis Citizenship, to do so. Our Citizenship process is an objective and verifiable procedure that will ensure all our rightful Citizens will have access to the benefits we will be negotiating on their behalf. I don't want any of you to miss out on the opportunities that are swiftly approaching us.

In closing, I want to share with you my thanks for your confidence and trust in me and your Métis government. I am honoured to be your President. To those of you who are shut in, sick or have cause to mourn, I send you my thoughts and prayers. May those of us who are healthy and strong, remember our neighbours and our families. Together we can withstand the challenges better than if we are alone. A proverb I once read states, "A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." Let us continue to stand together.

Meeqwetch,