

President's Message

February 8, 2017

A heavy sadness enveloped my heart, the hearts of our people, and those across the country when we learned the horrible news of the tragedy in Quebec. I was in Ottawa for the Crown-Métis Nation Summit. Out of respect, we decided to postpone our Summit to grieve with our brothers and sisters who lost loved ones in this unspeakable attack on community and sanctuary.

Deeply entrenched in the hearts of the Citizens of the Métis Nation are diversity, respect and acceptance for all people. The Métis Bill of Rights created in 1869 by Louis Riel and the Métis provisional government give expression to these values of equality at the heart of our Nation and our relationships. Our Bill of Rights formed the framework for the *Manitoba Act, 1870* and called on all governments to recognize and respect all people in the newly formed province of Manitoba and the country of Canada.

We remember we were once a displaced people ourselves, treated as foreigners in our own lands. The memories of the injustices we endured as a people continue to compel us to stand shoulder to shoulder with others who face oppression. From before the birth of Canada, we have always stood ready to defend those who called this land their home. And after Canada became a country and dominion, we continued to stand on guard for her. When she was threatened, our people always answered the call to come and lay down our lives in her defence.

I spoke with Minister Hehr recently in Ottawa about our Métis Veterans. I told him that it is a shame that Canada has never formally recognized and compensated our Métis Veterans for their sacrifice. Canada has settled with all its other Veterans and Prisoners of War of Canada's major conflicts, but not with the Métis. Our Métis Veterans fought for Canada and many died. Those Métis Veterans who did return, many bore the physical scars of harsh conflict. However, they all bore the emotional and psychological scars of warfare and loss.

You would expect our Veterans would be welcomed with open arms. Given help and support to return to life after having it so violently interrupted in the defence of our country and the defence of those under oppression. However, Canada once again forgot them. Sadly, many of our Métis Veterans have died, and many are on death's doorstep even now, without having been properly thanked or recognized for their valuable sacrifice. We are pressing Canada to correct this continued injustice.

Soon we will meet with Prime Minister Trudeau and the Government of Canada when we gather together as partners in Confederation at the rescheduled Crown-Métis Nation Summit. Already we have met with key cabinet ministers in preparation for this meeting. We have been working hard on your behalf to show Canada what is important and needed by our Métis Citizens. We believe this coming federal budget will begin to show the fruits of our hard work. I am not saying the work is done and we will have everything we have fought so long for, however I believe we will begin to see true forward progress. Just as you can see the wind play across the prairie grass before you feel it, I believe we will begin seeing those ripples play across the Métis Nation.

As we move toward Louis Riel Day on February 20th, I encourage you to celebrate this year's holiday with your loved ones and express your pride for your Métis heritage. The MMF and the Saint-Boniface Museum have partnered to offer visitors free access to the Museum and cultural programming to highlight Métis culture and Métis Nation's contribution to the creation of the province of Manitoba. All Manitobans, Métis or not, will have the chance to discover the roots of family, fairness, democracy and diversity that our province was built on – the manifest fruits of the leadership of Louis Riel and the Métis, the Founders of Manitoba.

I am grateful for Riel, and those who stood with him, as his values continue to empower the Métis Nation and Manitobans in current times. The MMF will remain vigilant to ensure Riel's legacy continues to be safeguarded, celebrated and recognized. Our visionary leader did not give his life in vain. We, the Métis, are a Nation that has never given up and never will, as we walk onward and carve our lasting place in history.

In closing, I offer my best wishes and prayers for peace to those who are sick, shut-in, or in failing health. My deepest sympathies are with all of you who are coping with grief or a recent loss. May you find comfort, strength, and help through your community and your family and friends. I wish you all the best. Should you be traveling during these frigid winter months, I pray warmth and security will be your companion.

Meeqwetch,