

October 18, 2017

President's Message

Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, stood before the world at the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Many have said he made one the most reflective and considered addresses of any world statesman about a state's relationship to, and reconciliation with, its Indigenous Peoples. As I recall, in his speech he specifically named the Métis Nation at least twice.

He acknowledged Canada's shameful colonial policies and history towards Indigenous peoples in this country. He spoke of the much-needed truth and went on to say that Canada is a "work in progress" and that his government is working to do better and not repeat the mistakes of the past. Indeed, the MMF has been working closely with Prime Minister Trudeau's government on this "work in progress." When past mistakes are repeated, it is because the MMF was not consulted or involved.

Our steps forward have always come with difficulty. In 1870, through treaty, we brought our homeland into Confederation and became recognized as Canada's Negotiating Partners in Confederation and Founders of Manitoba. By 1885, Louis Riel would write that Canada had not adequately fulfilled its obligations under its treaty with the Manitoba Métis. He went on to write that the Government neither protected them nor gave them justice. In 2013 Supreme Court of Canada acknowledged the MMF had a collective claim for the purpose of reconciliation between the descendants of the Métis people of the Red River Valley and Canada.

Upon election in 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that Canada is committed to advancing reconciliation and renewing the relationship. What is reconciliation? Unfortunately, the term reconciliation has become a new catch phrase or buzzword and used whenever there is talk of indigenous relations. At the very least it means dealing honestly and respectfully with each other, addressing past mistakes, and taking real action.

We have had successes: in 2016, we signed a historic milestone - the Framework Agreement for Advancing Reconciliation. We committed to working with Canada, on a nation-to-nation, government-to-government basis, through bilateral negotiations to advance reconciliation and renew the relationship through cooperation, respect for Métis rights, and ending the status quo.

We have been working towards reconciliation with the federal government. At our 2017 AGA, Minister of Indigenous Relations, Carolyn Bennett, announced Canada's full financial support for the Metis National Heritage Centre. Also at the AGA, Minister Petitpas Taylor and I announced our joint commitment exploring new opportunities in health services with the objective of supporting a healthy, secure and prosperous Manitoba Métis Community. But, as I have said above, moving towards Reconciliation is not without its challenges, and we must deal honestly and respectfully and act meaningfully.

In the news recently, and often, is the repulsive experience of the sixties scoop. Through a shameful program based on racial superiority and colonialism, our babies and children were taken from their mothers, fathers, grandparents, extended families and nation - not because of bad parenting - but, because our families were poor and seen as less worthy. Perhaps this can be described as an act of genocide as defined by the same United Nations to which Prime Minister Trudeau recently spoke.

Many of you may be unaware that for decades the MMF has been carefully and persistently working to help our families and children with little to no support from both the provincial or federal governments. Through the MMF's Métis Child and Family Services department, we established the Repatriation Program in the late 1990s. Through this program, we seek to reunite our Métis Nation babies and children, who we call our "Lost Moccasins", with their parents, families, culture, history and nation. The MMF repatriated our first Métis Nation baby in 1998.

The Federal government made a recent announcement that it would be resolving the issue of the sixties scoop with the First Nations. Unfortunately, the Métis Nation was left out. Our Lost Moccasins were forgotten. This is repeating past mistakes. The MMF was not made aware of the announcement ahead of time. Neither were we part of any discussions on how we might together solve the problem. Again, repeating past mistakes. Based on the new relationship we have been building with the Trudeau Government, I am confident this error can be overcome.

In the spirit of reconciliation, as had been clearly aspired to in the Prime Minister's United Nations speech, I have written to the responsible federal ministers about how we can move forward together to resolve this. We must ensure all of our Lost Moccasins are acknowledged, treated with respect, provided the opportunity to heal, and compensated like others who have suffered from Canada's colonial legacy. We will not accept Métis Nation exclusion. We must continue down the path of reconciliation.

My prayers are with our Elders, our sick, and our shut-ins. My thoughts are also with our veterans and the survivors of the sixties scoop and the day and residential schools. It is my goal that they receive respect and justice.

Meeqwetch,