



Press Release Attention News Editors

#100 Delia Gray Building
11738 Kingsway
Edmonton, AB T5G0X5
Phone: (780) 455-2200
Fax: (780) 452 8946

Alberta Métis Launch Historic Law Suit on Métis Harvesting

Edmonton, AB (December 2, 2008) – Today, the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) launched a historic legal action against the Alberta Government in the Alberta Court of Queen’s Bench. The action seeks a series of declarations that Métis in Alberta have the right to harvest throughout Alberta and that the province’s current regulatory regime is unconstitutional in its application to the Métis.

The MNA decided to file the claim because the recent actions of the provincial government including the termination of the *Interim Métis Harvesting Agreement*, the unilateral implementation of a restrictive Métis harvesting policy and the laying of 25 charges have created a repressive climate in Alberta that is deterring the Métis from exercising their right to harvest. This climate undermines the ability of the Métis to enjoy their way of life, maintain their relationship to the land and pass on their customs, practices and traditions to future generations.

“The MNA received clear direction from its 2007 Annual General Assembly to develop and implement a litigation strategy in order to ensure the constitutionally protected harvesting rights of Alberta Métis are recognized and respected by the province. With this law suit, we are moving forward on that mandate, as a part of our ‘Métis Hunt for Justice’ in this province,” said MNA President Audrey Poitras.

Cecil Bellrose, the MNA Minister of Métis Rights said that, “The MNA will no longer tolerate Métis Elders, single mothers, Métis youth and entire families being harassed for practicing our traditional harvesting practices that have been passed onto us by our ancestors and are a part of who we are as an Aboriginal people.”

Jean Teillet, legal counsel for the MNA stated that, “In 1982, the Constitution was amended to recognize and affirm the aboriginal rights of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis. The rules of the game where the provinces had unrestricted powers over Métis harvesting were supposed to change. Unfortunately, in Alberta nothing has changed. Métis continue to be charged for exercising their traditional harvesting practices. This action is a reasoned response to the situation. We will seek the assistance of the courts to ensure that Canada’s Constitution is implemented in Alberta.”

“This action will be the first of its kind in Canada. Prior test cases have focused on specific individuals defending themselves against charges. This case is about all of the Métis in Alberta and their rights as a part of the Métis Nation,” added Jason Madden, MNA legal counsel.

“The Métis in this province have a long history of working positively with the Alberta Government. In 2003, after the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that Métis have constitutionally protected harvesting rights in the Powley case, we negotiated a harvesting agreement that worked well for almost 3 years, until it was cancelled because of politics. As a result, we have been forced into using the courts to ensure Métis rights are recognized, but we remain committed to working with the Alberta Government because we know the courts should only be our last resort,” said MNA President Poitras.

In a demonstration of solidarity, Métis citizens and leadership from across the Métis Nation, including, the Presidents of the Métis National Council, Métis Nation of Ontario, Manitoba Métis Federation, Métis Nation – Saskatchewan and Métis Nation British Columbia joined the MNA at an event held at the Alberta legislature announcing the action.

For more information or interviews please contact:

Charity Solokan
MNA Communications
Cell: 780-700-8183
Email : csokolan@metis.org