

Remarks by MNC President Clément Chartier
Roundtable on Aboriginal Engagement and Participation
in Major Resource Development Projects

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It is a good idea to start the Forum's series of discussions with federal government, industry and Aboriginal representatives because of the broad national perspective that can be applied to the questions at hand, in our case to the unique situation of the Métis Nation with respect to major projects.

While the Métis population of 400,000 is only one third of the total Aboriginal population in Canada, we are the largest single Aboriginal people and nation, that is, a people with a common history, culture and political will.

Métis communities face historical and legal barriers to participation in major resource development projects due to the lack of a land base with natural resources and legally recognized Métis governments.

This flows from past federal policies of non-recognition of Métis and our exclusion from contemporary land claims agreements.

In fact, even though we are one of the three constitutionally recognized Aboriginal peoples, the federal government continues to say we are a provincial responsibility.

This impacts on industry's approach to dealing with us, either ignoring or discounting our interest when the Duty to Consult is delegated to them by the Crown for major projects.

This is unfortunate because the Métis are natural partners for this type of development, given our critical role in the historic fur trade and opening the west to economic development.

In fact, our labor force participation rate is much closer to that of the general population than it is to that of other Aboriginal peoples, so it is more than likely that our people will be working and our businesses bidding on the major projects anticipated by the Forum.

We have also worked with the federal government in building an effective Métis Nation employment and training infrastructure across the five westernmost provinces and Métis financial institutions that have supported large-scale business creation and expansion and job creation.

So our workers and entrepreneurs are very keen on capitalizing on the opportunities from major projects.

At the same time, our communities feel that they are not being adequately consulted or accommodated and this sets the stage for confrontation, not collaboration.

The Supreme Court of Canada will soon render a ruling on our historic land claims in *Manitoba Metis Federation v Canada and Manitoba*.

We are seeking a declaration that will require the federal government to enter into negotiation of a contemporary land claims agreement including self-government with the Métis Nation.

This will be followed by similar lawsuits covering the rest of the prairie provinces and northeastern BC.

At the same time, under a Métis Nation Protocol signed in 2008, the Métis National Council is working with the federal government on accords on governance and economic development which could become part of a self-government agreement.

One way or another, through litigation or negotiation, it makes eminent sense to re-align the federal policy on Métis to be consistent with Section 35 of the Constitution Act as well as to facilitate broader Métis participation in major economic development projects.

