

SPEAKING NOTES: CABINET RETREAT

June 21, 2019

Let me provide you with a brief snapshot of who we are and where we come from in order to help you understand how far we've gone with your government and where we want to go.

Next year the Métis Nation celebrates the 150th anniversary of its joining Canada through the *Manitoba Act, 1870* which brought the Red River Settlement into Confederation as the Province of Manitoba.

The Act was the result of a negotiated agreement between the first Métis Provisional Government of President Louis Riel and the federal government of John A. Macdonald.

The new Province of Manitoba had an 83% Métis majority.

Our hope at that time was that our interests as a distinct people and nation could be accommodated within the federation through provincial status and provincial powers.

A central component of the *Manitoba Act* was a land grant for the children of the Métis heads of families that would enable us to consolidate our majority position in the new province of our creation.

That guarantee was breached deliberately by Ottawa through a punitive military expedition which ushered in a 2 ½ year reign of terror on our people and a ten-year delay in the distribution of land.

From 1870 to 1884, two thirds of the Métis people moved out of the original province of Manitoba.

In 1885 we formed the Second Métis Provisional Government in Saskatchewan, again under the leadership of Riel to press for land title and responsible government.

The result was the only civil war in Canada's post-Confederation history, the defeat of our army at Batoche and the trial and execution of our leader.

This began the Diaspora of the Métis Nation, and our treatment by the state as individuals and not as a collective, a deliberate move to destroy the integrity of our nation.

Between 1885 and 1910, successive Federal government commissions distributed scrip to the Métis across the Prairies in response to land claims but the process was so complex and rife with fraud that the Supreme Court of Canada would later describe the history of scrip speculation and devaluation as "a sorry chapter in our nation's history".

We became the road allowance people and squatters in our own land, basically internal refugees.

When the federal government transferred control over public lands and natural resources to the Prairie Provinces in 1930, it closed the books on our land claims and on its relationship with our people.

During the Depression era we formed associations on the Prairies to press our claims and address the dire social and economic conditions of that time.

We organized at the provincial level because Ottawa refused to deal with us, saying we were citizens like any other and a responsibility of the Provinces.

It tried to define us out of existence, actually removing us from the census in 1941.

Our provincial associations met with limited success in dealing with the provinces.

The MNC's Governing Member or provincial affiliate in Alberta, the Métis Nation of Alberta, then known as the Métis Association of Alberta, was able to work with the Province to establish a land base and local self-government for the Métis Settlements through provincial legislation in 1938.

Our communities mobilized heavily to join the Second World War effort and our veterans assumed prominent roles in our Prairie associations after the war, determined to achieve for us the freedom and justice they had fought for in the liberation of the populations of Europe and Asia from fascist rule.

The first thawing in the longstanding federal policy of non-recognition of the Métis came under Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's government in the 1970s.

It was highly limited, recognizing the Métis as a special-needs, not a special rights, people.

We were excluded from the comprehensive and specific land claims policies on the grounds our rights had been extinguished by law but we would participate in some special programming.

This enabled our Governing Members on the prairies to start building province-wide, professionally managed service delivery platforms that would over the decades prove to be a successful and cost-efficient method of reaching our people and addressing their needs in the cities, where most of our population live, as well as in the rural, northern and remote regions.

Starting with the delivery of the Rural and Native Housing Program in the 1970s, our Governing Members expanded into employment and training and business development program delivery in the 1980s. The four First Ministers Conferences on Aboriginal

Constitutional Matters in the 1980s and the Charlottetown Round in 1992 failed to produce a breakthrough on Aboriginal self-government but accelerated our own efforts to build self-government from within.

Starting in 1979, our Governing Members on the Prairies established province wide one-person, one vote ballot box elections for leadership and other institutions and procedures to strengthen democratic and fiscal accountability.

Through our General Assembly in 2002, the Métis Nation established its citizenship criteria which would be validated by the Supreme Court of Canada's *Powley* decision a year later.

Since that decision recognizing us as full-fledged rights bearing people under Section 35, our people have been registered in our citizenship registries that require proof of an ancestral connection to, and acceptance by, the historic Métis Nation community.

Adherence to our democratic accountability and citizenship systems are core components of the constitutions of our Governing Members and are conditions for their participation in the Métis National Council, the national government of the Métis Nation.

On that note, I should state that we welcomed your government's proposal to replace the Comprehensive Claims and Inherent Right Policies, both of which excluded us either explicitly or in effect, with a new section 35 rights based policy.

This policy direction would fit squarely with the self-government agreements your government and our governments are pursuing at the section 35 tables in addition to the settlement of the Manitoba Métis land claim pursuant to the declaration of the Supreme Court of Canada in the 2013 *Manitoba Metis Federation* decision.

We welcome the progress your government has been making with our Governing Members on these agreements.

At the same time, I am concerned that your new policy direction has made self-government recognition contingent on the conclusion of agreements on core governance, which contains numerous conditions precedent, something the National Indigenous leadership soundly rejected in the 1987 constitutional conference.

Our governance structure whether it be constitutions, electoral laws and procedures, or citizenship system, is well developed and is the basis of how Métis Nation citizens have been governing themselves for decades.

We believe this governance system should be recognized and legally enabled now.

Another concern is the scope of the individual self-government agreements with each Governing Member. Despite the partition of our nation by provincial boundaries imposed on us historically, we are one people with a common history, culture and political consciousness.

For the Métis Nation as a whole, matters such as adherence to our citizenship code and democratic accountability are integral to our sense of nationhood and controls must be maintained and binding on the Métis Nation as a whole, as well as at the provincial level.

This should happen at a national section 35 rights table, as well as in a new federal policy.

We are disappointed that the draft legislation applying UNDRIP to Canadian law will not be adopted before the election, nor will a new federal section 35 rights based policy for the Métis Nation.

However, we hope to take this up in the fall, perhaps building on the 10 Principles respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous peoples.

The Permanent Bilateral Mechanism and the Canada Métis Nation Accord which have worked remarkably well, demonstrate the effectiveness of dealing with the Métis Nation as a whole.

The Métis Nation as a whole has co-developed policies, programs and budget asks with your government and concluded accords in the priority areas.

These accords set out broad strategies, frameworks and budget commitments and are implemented through sub-agreements with the Governing Members which have sole responsibility for program and service delivery.

The accords and federal budget allocations for the Métis Nation in housing, skills and employment training, early learning and child care, post-secondary education, economic development, and veterans are unprecedented and will do more for Métis people than the cumulative efforts of all previous federal governments.

In part, this a result of the diligence and passion of Ministers Bennett, O'Regan, Hadju and Duclos who were instrumental in co-developing the proposals and recommendations for new policies and investments with us.

It also reflects, Mr. Prime Minister, your clear understanding and appreciation of the need for a distinctions-based approach in dealing with our issues.

Proposal driven pan-Indigenous programs or off-reserve programs simply don't work for us.

As we move into other priority areas of the Canada-Métis Nation Accord beyond those of the lead ministers, a whole of government approach is essential if further progress is to be achieved.

I realize this will be difficult as many Ministers and departments have had little if any relationship with us and I hope that the Ministers who clearly understand how to work successfully with us can help in bringing them onside.

We also thank your government for the budget allocation dealing with our WWII Veterans, and encourage you and Minister Bennett to try and reach a speedy conclusion on Métis residential schools and the 60s Scoop, including the Ile a la Crosse residential school.

Moving forward, we hope to work productively with the President of the Treasury board on a new fiscal relationship advancing reconciliation and nationhood, one with a results and performance measurement framework cutting across all departments rather than a program output based approach.

We are very encouraged by the Cabinet's approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion and hope to engage meaningfully with Finance and NRCAN in maximizing our participation in the project.

Progress in the implementation of our economic development and clean growth strategy will require overcoming many barriers we face with Infrastructure, Environment and Regional Development departments and agencies.

A new distinctions-based federal Indigenous procurement policy under development will require the cooperation of all departments, most of which have had no relationship with our businesses.

The Métis Nation is also grateful for your approach to intergovernmental relations with the three National Representatives of Indigenous Nations and Peoples, an example that Premiers should adopt.

So the challenges moving forward are certainly there but based on the mutual trust and cooperation your government has established with the Métis Nation, I am very confident we can continue to work and succeed together in the future.

Turning briefly to international matters, I once again call on your government to endorse the 2016 American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and seriously consider re-introducing an IPPP-like aid program for Latin America and funding for the American Council of Indigenous Peoples.

Finally, as we move into 2020 and Canada-Métis Nation 150, I look forward to working closely with Minister Rodriguez, and based on my April letters to Cabinet, I believe this must be a whole of government initiative, a clear example to Canada and the world of reconciliation in action.

Marsi, Thank you, Merci.