

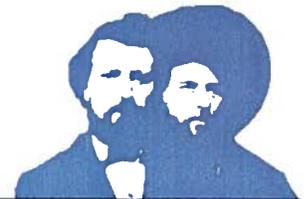
PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2002



MÉTIS NATIONAL COUNCIL
18TH ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
EDMONTON, ALBERTA

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

INTRODUCTION

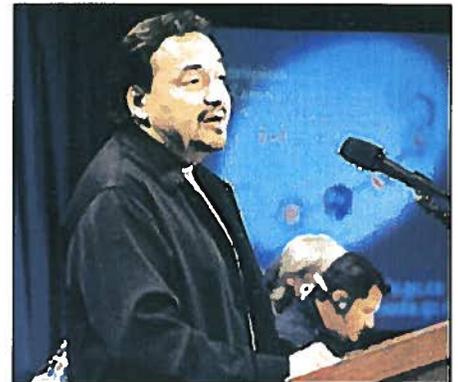


It is with great honour and pride that I welcome you to the Métis National Council's 18th Annual General Assembly in Edmonton, Alberta.

I would like to thank the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) for acting as our gracious hosts for this Assembly. As well, I would like to congratulate Audrey Poitras on her recent re-election as MNA President, Trevor Gladue as the newly elected Vice-President of the MNA and the entire MNA Provincial Council on their new mandates. I look forward to working with all of you in moving forward on the Métis Nation's aspirations over the next few years.

This year, our Assembly's theme is *A Celebration of Strength*. As we all are well aware, over the generations, our Nation has faced numerous challenges and obstacles in maintaining our existence as a distinct Indigenous people. It is our collective strength that has carried us through those dark years and it is our collective strength that will carry us through to a bright and exciting future! At this Assembly, we will be taking some time to reflect on and celebrate this collective strength.

From the screening of the Métis-made movie *Red River West Rendezvous* to hosting an all ages talent show, our culture and heritage will be shared with everyone over the next few days. As well, this evening we will be paying special tribute to our own Métis veterans who went to fight on behalf of our Nation and Canada for freedom and democracy. Veterans from across the Homeland will be in attendance to receive the recognition and respect they so rightfully deserve.



"As we all are well aware, over the generations, our nation has faced numerous challenges and obstacles in maintaining our existence as a distinct Indigenous people. It is our collective strength that has carried us through those dark years and it is our collective strength that will carry us through to a bright and exciting future!"

As many of you are aware, a recent reprehensible decision by the federal government on the compensation for Aboriginal veterans has once again excluded the Métis. This insulting action is inexcusable and at this Assembly I look forward to a discussion on this issue, lead by David Chartrand, as the Minister responsible within the Métis Nation Cabinet, along with our National Métis Veterans Association in order to identify ways in which we can ensure our veterans are fairly compensated.



As the national president, I am committed to ensuring our veterans are treated equitably and respectfully. Based on the direction of this Assembly, I will quickly move forward on this issue.



As you will see throughout this Assembly, great strides are being made on our national agenda. However, I want to recognize that these gains and victories flow from the collective strength, vision and resolve of our people and communities throughout the Homeland.



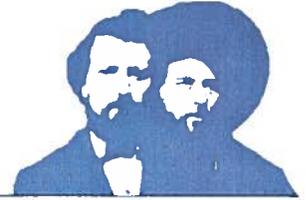
From our Elders and Senators who give their time and share their wisdom, to our public service who tirelessly work for and on behalf of the Métis Nation, to the citizens who come out and vote in our elections, to the leadership who tirelessly represent our people at a community, regional, provincial, national and international level—all of us play a vital role in moving our national agenda forward.

I want to thank all our citizens for their on-going commitment to the Métis Nation. As I have said many times, the MNC and its Governing Members are the expression of Métis nationalism which is a peoples movement; therefore, we must remain committed to staying together as one people, one voice, one Nation.

“I want to recognize that these gains and victories flow from the collective strength, vision and resolve of our people and communities throughout the Homeland”

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE



In June of last year, I had the honour of being once again elected president of the MNC by the Annual General Assembly.

As a part of my election platform and in my acceptance speech, I laid out a vision that we, as the leaders of the Métis Nation, could collaboratively work on over my new mandate.

At the same time, I committed to moving forward on specific initiatives in the following areas:

- Establishing a New Relationship with the Government of Canada to Address Métis Rights and Land Issues;
- Supporting Métis Litigation;
- Adopting A National Definition of Métis;
- Strengthening Our National Government; and
- Enhancing Métis Nation Participation within International Fora.

I am happy to report progress in all of these areas over the past year. I am extremely excited to provide the Assembly with the following update on these areas.



Establishing a New Relationship with the Government of Canada to Address Métis Rights and Land Issues

It must be recognized that the current federal position of not dealing with Métis rights and lands or “negotiating” with the Métis Nation is deeply entrenched within the Canadian federation. Since the days of Riel, the federal government has consistently attempted to treat the Métis as individuals rather than as an Aboriginal people with collective rights and interests. Unfortunately, successive governments have adopted a policy of neglect by refusing to deal with the outstanding claims and issues of the Métis Nation.



Regardless of these unprincipled and dishonourable federal positions, the Métis Nation has continued to persevere in attempting to secure a rights-based negotiations process with Canada through political means, litigation and international pressure.

As most of you will be aware, in January 1998, the federal government announced its formal response to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) final report entitled, *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*. Unfortunately, *Gathering Strength* addressed none of RCAP's substantive recommendations with respect to the Métis people.

As that time, the leadership of the Métis Nation was publicly critical of the federal response; however, the Federal Interlocutor for Métis, Minister Ralph Goodale made a public commitment to develop a “Métis-specific, forward-looking agenda” with the Métis Nation.

Since that time, the MNC, in partnership with its Governing Members, has continued to work with Minister Goodale in order to realize a rights-based agenda; namely, a *Métis Nation Agenda*. Within his report to the Assembly, Tony Belcourt, the Minister responsible for the *Métis Nation Agenda* in the Métis Nation Cabinet will provide you with a detailed update on the progress being made in this Ministry.

“Regardless of these unprincipled and dishonourable federal government positions, the Métis Nation has continued to persevere on attempting to secure a rights-based negotiations process with Canada through political means, litigation and international pressure.”

"I view the exploratory discussion process as a very significant and sincere endeavour on the part of the Government of Canada to begin addressing the long outstanding issues of the Métis Nation. I am hopeful that ... these exploratory discussions will allow us to develop a framework for future negotiations, rather than the courts having to define the Métis Nation's relationship with Canada."

- Gerald Morin, MNC President
July 25, 2002

However, on this topic, I am pleased to report that over the past few years, I have met formally with the majority of the federal Cabinet to brief them on the Métis Nation and to garner support for a *Métis Nation Agenda*. The groundwork from these meetings will be extremely important when Minister Goodale seeks the support of his Cabinet colleagues in order to move forward with the MNC.

As well, the MNC, in collaboration with the Governing Members, recently produced and circulated the *Snapshot of the Nation* report to all of federal Cabinet as well as key policy makers within the federal system. The *Snapshot* is an impressive document which highlights the strength, capacity and ability of the Métis Nation and will be extremely helpful in building support for a *Métis Nation Agenda* within the federal government.

Finally, I am pleased to report that in July of this year at the *Back to Batoche* celebrations, Minister Goodale and I initiated a 6 month exploratory discussion process on an array of identified issues, including Métis rights and land issues.

The purpose of the process is to discuss the positions and views of the MNC and Canada in order to assess whether there is a basis for future negotiations and to determine next steps. Central to this process will be discussions on a draft Métis Nation Framework Agreement that has been tabled with Minister Goodale based on a resolution from last year's Annual General Assembly.

Based on the increased political awareness of the Métis Nation and the on-going litigation, I am optimistic that at the end of this 6 month process, the federal government will want to continue to work with the MNC and move forward on entering into a rights-based negotiations process.

As always, the MNC remains firmly committed that any new relationship with the federal government must be rights-based and recognize the Métis Nation as a distinct Aboriginal people within Canada.

"I want to say it is my firm conviction that the Métis people are a fundamental part of the fabric of this nation and this nation does not yet accord the Métis people the respect and recognition which in my judgement they deserve."

- Ralph Goodale,
Federal Interlocutor for Métis
July 25, 2002

Supporting Métis Litigation

Flowing from the Métis Nation's on-going support of litigation, the upcoming year will be a legal turning point for Métis rights across the Homeland.

The first two substantive Métis rights cases, *R. v. Powley* and *R. v. Blais*, will be heard before the Supreme Court of Canada in January or February of 2003. It is anticipated that the Supreme Court will hand down judgements in these cases between 8 to 12 months following the hearings or even sooner.

These cases will have an effect on the rights of all Métis citizens across the Homeland; therefore, I am happy to report that the MNC has obtained intervenor status in both cases to ensure the voice and positions of the Métis Nation are heard. I have full confidence that our own Métis lawyers, Jean Teillet, Clem Chartier and Jason Madden will admirably represent our Nation before the highest court of the land.

Based on the *Powley* case's three decisive victories at the lower court levels, I am confident that we will be successful at the Supreme Court of Canada. I want to emphasize the significance of *Powley* for the entire nation. Similar to how case names like *Calder*, *Sparrow* and *Delgamuukw* are synonymous with victories for all First Nation peoples, *Powley* will take on the same stature for the Métis Nation.

Powley is the case that will set out the legal test on how a Métis community establishes a harvesting right protected by s. 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. Even though the facts of the case focus on the Métis community of Sault Ste. Marie, the legal principles articulated by the Supreme Court will apply to Métis communities throughout the Homeland. Many of our communities from Ontario to British Columbia will be able to meet the same legal facts established by the Sault Ste. Marie Métis community; therefore, a positive decision would be an immense negotiations tool for the entire Nation.



“Similar to how case names like Calder, Sparrow and Delgamuukw are synonymous with victories for all First Nation peoples, Powley will take on the same stature for the Métis Nation.”

Following a judgement in our favour, it is expected that provincial governments will begin the process of ensuring their harvesting regulatory regimes recognize and respect the constitutionally protected harvesting rights of the Métis. Some provinces have already engaged in negotiations with Governing Members on harvesting issues; however, the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Powley* will add elevated certainty and support for the recognition of Métis harvesting rights within these negotiations.

“The government cannot simply sit on its hands and then defend its inaction because the nature of the right or the identity of the bearers of the right is uncertain.”

- Justice Sharpe,
Ontario Court of Appeal in *R. v. Powley*

I would like to thank the Powleys and the Métis Nation of Ontario for their on-going commitment to this important litigation. Your dedication to Métis rights is a testament to the strength of our nation.

In addition, the MNC continues to support other important litigation that is at various stages across the Homeland. I am happy to report that this year we will once again be providing resources to *MMF v. Canada* (the Dumont Case), the *Northwest Saskatchewan Land Claim* and *Maurice v. Canada* which continue to be readied for trial.

All of these cases continue to pave the way for us to fully exercise our inherent rights as an Aboriginal people within Canada. This litigation sends the resounding message to the governments within Canada that we will continue to stand up and assert our rights and they must sit down and negotiate with us. The MNC remains committed to advancing Métis rights litigation for the benefit of the entire Nation.

As well, at this Assembly, Tony Belcourt, the Minister responsible for Litigation, along with Jason Madden, General Counsel to the MNC will provide a more detailed update on this area.



Adopting A National Definition of Métis

As I stated in my election platform, one of the most important issues our contemporary Nation faces is adopting a national definition of Métis. We must stand together as a nation of people and assert who we are.

We can no longer tolerate outside governments, individuals or organizations defining who the citizens of the Métis Nation are. Our collective right to define our own citizenship is an inherent right - vested in us by the Creator. We must exercise this right in order to protect the distinct history, language, traditions, customs and culture of the Métis Nation within Canada.

Over the past years, the MNC and its Governing Member have undertaken extensive consultations on this issue. Last year, this Assembly adopted an in-principle definition to be brought back to our communities and people for further consultation.

I am hopeful that at this Assembly, we will adopt a national definition of Métis which will then be implemented consistently throughout the Governing Members. If this is achieved at this Assembly, this will be a historic moment in our on-going history as an Aboriginal people within Canada. As well, once this national definition is adopted the MNC can begin to move forward on developing and establishing a national registry of all Métis citizens.



“Our collective right to define our own citizenship is an inherent right - vested in us by the Creator. We must exercise this right in order to protect the distinct history, language, traditions, customs and culture of the Métis Nation within Canada.”

Strengthening Our National Government

Continuing to strengthen our national government is fundamental to moving our self-government agenda forward and keeping us together as a Nation. We must not be afraid of taking bold steps in implementing Métis self-government at a national level. It is our inherent right as an Aboriginal people to govern ourselves and as leaders we have a responsibility to develop a national government structure that represents our people democratically, fairly, transparently and respectfully.

Over the past few years, we have moved forward on various governance initiatives to do just that. These include:

Métis Nation Cabinet

In my election platform, I committed to working with all leadership to ensure that we stay together as a strong and effective national political voice for the Métis Nation within Canada.

Therefore, in consultation with the MNC Board of Governors, I implemented the Métis Nation Cabinet to allow for the skills and knowledge of the MNC Board of Governors to better assist me at the national level in various sectors and initiatives.

To date, the Métis Nation Cabinet has been a wonderful compliment to the MNC's internal governance through an improved collaborative approach and being able to more effectively respond to the various demands of the Métis Nation in the areas of rights, governance, health, social development, culture and heritage, environment, economic development, youth and women's issues.

I would like to thank each Cabinet Minister for their time and efforts on behalf of the Métis Nation and I look forward to continuing to work as an effective team.



Métis Nation Constitution

As a part of my election platform and based upon resolutions from the 1998 and 2001 Annual General Assemblies, I am pleased to report we are moving forward on realizing a Métis Nation Constitution.

Beginning this Fall, Clem Chartier, as the Minister responsible for Governance, along with a Métis Nation Constitution Commission will be holding consultations with each Governing Member on this subject. Minister Chartier will be providing a more detailed update on this process during the Assembly.

A Métis Nation Constitution will bring our national government to new levels. As MNC President, I am committed to moving forward on this initiative.

National Ballot Box Election for MNC President

Democracy has always been a value that the Métis Nation has held dear. Many of our people have fought to their death for it. The Métis veterans we will honour tonight were willing to give up their lives for it. Each Governing Member holds province-wide ballot box elections to ensure their citizens have the opportunity to vote for their leader. As well, our people admire honourable men like Nelson Mandela who fought their entire lives to bring democracy to their people.

We must continue to strive for true democracy within the Métis Nation. The principle of one-person, one-vote is sacred. However, our current election mechanism for the MNC president is inconsistent with this value.

We must provide the opportunity for each and every Métis citizen to vote for their national president!

This will strengthen the legitimacy of our national government structure in the eyes of others; but, most importantly in the eyes of our own people.

“We should not be ‘boxed-in’ or afraid to implement a governance system that is reflective and responsive to our unique needs.

We must move towards a Métis Nation Constitution built on democratic, traditional and representative principles.”

-Gerald Morin,
President Report 2001



“Democracy and human rights are inseparable.”

- Nelson Mandela, 1996

In my election platform last year, I committed to looking into models on how a Homeland-wide election of the MNC President could be held by 2004. In order to follow up on this election commitment, the MNC has been working with the Institute on Governance on looking at the feasibility of undertaking such an initiative.

As well, I will be encouraging this Assembly to support of a resolution which would mandate myself and the MNC Board of Governors to move towards having the next selection of MNC President as a nation-wide ballot-box election process in 2004. This election process must be grounded on fairness, transparency, legitimacy, reliability, providing an opportunity for all Métis citizens to vote and maintaining independence from the election dates of other Governing Member's in order to avoid weighting the voter turnout.

In order to be a truly democratic Nation, we owe this to our people. They have the right to elect their national leader. I am hopeful that the leadership at this Assembly will support this initiative in order to make a nation-wide election of the MNC President a reality.

Participation within International Forums

The MNC has continued to increase its participation within international fora in order to raise awareness and draw attention to the issues facing the Métis Nation within Canada.

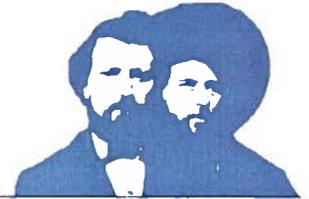
Over the past year, the Métis Nation has continued to be actively involved in the United Nations and the Organization of American States. As well, we have had prominent delegations at the inauguration of the United Nation's Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the World Conference Against Racism and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

During the Assembly, Tony Belcourt, as the Minister responsible for International Affairs will be providing a report on the MNC's on-going involvement in the international community over the past year.

The MNC remains committed to increasing the Métis Nation's profile in the international community and using all tools available to us in order to push forward on Métis rights, self-government and self-determination.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

CLOSING COMMENTS



As you can see from my President's Report, it is an exciting time for our nation as we continue to grow stronger.

At this Assembly, we will take the time to celebrate our strength as well as set out our collective vision to grow stronger in the years to come.

We must continue to work together, as a people, in order to move forward on our national vision and rights-based agenda! We must continue to strive towards a truly democratic, accountable and strong national government! We must maintain our commitment to Métis nationalism!

Thank you for your on-going support over the past year. I look forward to an exciting and positive assembly.

Yours very truly,

Gerald Morin
President
Métis National Council



Métis Nation Governments

CONTACT INFORMATION



Métis National Council
350 Sparks St., Suite 201
Delta Hotel Office Tower
Ottawa, ON K1R 7S8
T: 613-232-3216
F: 613-232-4262
W: www.metisnation.ca

Métis Nation of Ontario
500 - #3 Old St. Patrick St.
Ottawa, ON K1N 9G4
T: 613-798-1488
F: 613-722-4225
W: www.metisnation.org

the Métis
Nation of
Ontario



Manitoba Métis Federation
150 Henry Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 0J7
T: 204-586-8474
F: 204-947-1816
W: www.mmf.mb.ca

Métis Nation - Saskatchewan
219 Robin Crescent, 2nd Floor
Saskatoon, SK S7L 6M8
T: 306-343-8285
F: 306-343-0171
W: www.metisnation-sask.com

MÉTIS NATION -
SASKATCHEWAN



Métis Nation of Alberta
100 - 11738 Kingsway Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5G 0X5
T: 780-455-2200
F: 780-452-8946

Métis Provincial Council of British Columbia
Suite 1128 - 789 West Pender St.
Vancouver, BC V6C 1H2
T: 604-801-5853
F: 604-801-5097
W: www.mpcbc.bc.ca



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