



Métis Nation of Alberta

A strong Métis Nation embracing Métis rights

(780) 455-2200 | 1-800-252-7553 | albertametis.com | mna@metis.org
11738 Kingsway NW | 100 Delia Gray Building | Edmonton, AB | T5G 0X5

Métis Nation Rising

Canada and the Métis Nation of Alberta sign a historic self-government agreement

By President Audrey Poitras

July 5 marks the 135th anniversary of Louis Riel’s return to Canada to lead the fight for Métis rights. He dreamed of– and fought and died for – self-determination for the Métis people. Last week, after more than 13 decades, his vision of Métis self-government was finally recognized by the Government of Canada.

On Thursday June 27, 2019, Canada and the Métis Nation of Alberta (“MNA”) signed a historic agreement. The agreement recognizes that the Métis Nation within Alberta has an inherent, constitutionally protected right to self-government. It establishes a formal process that will lead to the recognition of a modern, Métis government for all Métis Nation citizens in Alberta. This process will include the adoption of both a constitution by the Métis Nation within Alberta and legislation by the federal government. Finally, Métis self-government is being recognized for what it is: an essential pillar of Confederation.

The story that got us here predates Canada by generations. The Métis Nation was initially born of the fur trade around the turn of the 19th Century, as European men and First Nations women in the old northwest raised families and built communities. Soon, we developed our own language, culture, and identity distinct from our forebears—neither European nor First Nations. We became much more than simply a group of mixed-blooded individuals. We became a new Indigenous people, a new nation. As an Indigenous people, we have the right to self-determination and self-government. Indeed, we have always been staunchly independent. In Plains Cree and in Michif (the Métis language), we are called *Otipemisiwak*—the free people, the ones who own themselves.

The Métis Nation’s relationship with Canada has rarely been easy. Immediately following Confederation, Canada moved west into our homeland without acknowledging that we were already here, living off our own land and overseeing our own affairs. Our response was distinctly Métis: under Louis Riel’s leadership, we declared a provisional government and negotiated terms of union with Canada. Although Canada would fail to honour our agreement, the precedent was set. When faced with adversity, the Métis Nation’s response has always been the same: to govern ourselves.

Through the late 19th and early 20th century, we organized across Alberta. From Cypress Hills to St. Albert, from Lesser Slave Lake to Fort Chipewyan, we came together as Métis Nation

citizens to advocate for our rights and lands. These were the building blocks of Métis self-government in the province. In 1928, we created what is now the MNA to be a united voice for the Métis Nation within Alberta. Ever since, dedicated Métis individuals from across Alberta have worked with the MNA for the benefit of our families, our communities, and our nation. With our new agreement, Canada finally recognizes the MNA as the authorized representative of the Métis Nation within Alberta in implementing our inherent right to self-government.

Why does the Métis Nation within Alberta need self-government? Because successive provincial and federal governments have failed us. This was true when the MNA was founded, and it is true now. For generations, educational outcomes, employment prospects, and health indicators of Métis in Alberta have fallen shamefully short of those of non-Indigenous Canadians. The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls highlights how tragically true this is. We face systemic disadvantages rooted in colonialism, racism, and indifference. No non-Métis government has cared enough or been committed enough to correct these problems. Only a Métis government will be able or willing to respond to our unique needs and ambitions as Métis Nation citizens.

The agreement signed by Canada and the MNA is meant to put an end to generations of denial and neglect. This federal government has had the courage to do what no federal government before it would: acknowledge our right to take charge of ourselves. Now, we can move forward—together—in the spirit of recognition and respect. Canada has handed the Métis Nation the reins. Where we go from here is up to us.

