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OPINION

# To achieve reconciliation, Canada needs to recognize the Métis as a self-governing nation

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The Métis story is one of resistance and resilience. In recent years, we have been writing a new chapter to our story with Canada based on reconciliation. This spring, we hope to solidify the progress we have made as a people with the introduction and passage of federal recognition legislation by Parliament.

The Métis people emerged long before Canada became the country we know today. While some of our history is tied to the fur trade and, in a biological sense, we are the descendants of First Nations women and European men, this is an overly simplistic and flawed understanding of who we are. We are a distinct people made up of communities with our own unique history, identity, culture and rights. And while the Métis resistances at the Red River from 1869 to 1870 and the Battle of Batoche in 1885 are more well-known, our people were never limited to just those locations, and our history is often untold.

Our Métis ancestors were determined to govern themselves and to protect our traditions, values and truth for generations to come. Their efforts began more than two centuries ago when Métis leaders fought to have our rights recognized. Many of our ancestors petitioned the Crown and took collective action, including taking up arms in some regions of our homeland to defend Métis identity, lands, our way of life and our rights. They fought back against Canada's expansionist agenda as well as a fraudulent scrip system that dispossessed our families and communities of our lands.

Over generations, the Crown made various bargains with our ancestors to advance Canada's expansionist agenda, but those promises were quickly broken, and our rights were denied and ignored. We did what we needed to do to keep our communities and nationhood alive. We built our self-government structures by coming together in assemblies and democratic elections, and by sheer force of will. While we did not have much in those days, we always had each other.

That resilience drove our fight for rights recognition to the highest court in Canada. This year marks the 20th anniversary of *R. v. Powley* – the first and only Supreme Court of Canada case that recognized that Métis rights are protected by the Constitution. To this day, the landmark decision has remained foundational for continuing Métis rights assertions and negotiations.

In 2015, the federal government finally began to engage with Métis governments in a meaningful way based on the direction in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's [mandate letter](#) to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs to “work, on a nation-to-nation basis, with the Métis Nation to advance reconciliation and renew the relationship, based on cooperation, respect for rights, our international obligations, and a commitment to end the status quo.”

After years of negotiations, the [Métis Nation of Alberta](#), [Métis Nation of Ontario](#) and [Métis Nation–Saskatchewan](#) signed self-government recognition and implementation agreements with Canada earlier this year. The agreements immediately recognize that our Métis governments are the Indigenous governments representing our citizens. The agreements also recognize that our Métis governments have law-making powers and authority over our citizenship, elections, governance operations, as well as Métis child and family services.

In order to implement these agreements, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Marc Miller committed to introducing federal implementation legislation on Métis self-government into Parliament this session to anchor our nation-to-nation, government-to-government relationship. From the failed constitutional conferences in the 1980s, to the Métis Nation Accord being rejected as a part of the Charlottetown Accord in the 1990s, to the Kelowna Accord in 2015, we have been close to having our self-government recognized in federal law, only to have politics overtake promises or principles.

This federal recognition legislation will ensure that even as governments come and go, the recognition of our Métis self-government will not be subject to political change. From the Métis perspective, this legislation would finally fulfill the constitutional promise to the Métis people, and ultimately protect the agreement we are currently negotiating with Canada as a modern-day self-government treaty. Its introduction and passage will be reconciliation in action, advancing the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) in a concrete and practical way.

We are calling on Parliament to support this important legislation once introduced. Instead of being known as the “forgotten people,” we will be recognized as an equal order of government alongside other self-governing First Nations and Inuit. Passage of this legislation will finally end the legacy of ignoring the Métis and denying our rights as an Indigenous people. This historic step forward in achieving reconciliation in Canada is long past due.

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