

On behalf of the Métis Nation, I join President Audrey Poitras of the Métis Nation of Alberta and President Bruce Dumont of the Métis Nation British Columbia in welcoming you to this important summit on Métis Nation economic development.

My name is Clément Chartier, President of the Métis National Council, the national and international representative of the Métis Nation.

The Métis National Council, together with its five provincial affiliated Governing Members, constitutes the government of the Métis people in our historic homeland covering the three Prairie provinces and extending into parts of Ontario, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories.

In addition to the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis Nation British Columbia who are co-sponsoring this event with the Métis National Council, the other Governing Members of the MNC are the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, the Manitoba Metis Federation, and the Métis Nation of Ontario.

The Métis people are no stranger to economic development.

Our original ancestors were children of the fur trade, the offspring of European fur traders and Indian women who, over time, emerged as a new people with their own culture, traditions, and language in Métis communities along the fur trade route of the old Northwest.

The Métis assumed key roles in the fur trade economy as freighters, boatmen, traders, interpreters, and suppliers of food from the buffalo hunt.

The Red River cart trails and York boat waterway routes established by the Métis opened the west to economic development.

Our ancestors also developed a sense of political identity or nationalism that enabled them to organize to protect and fight for their rights when their lands and interests were threatened. In 1816, a Métis force under the command of Cuthbert Grant defeated the

Selkirk settlers at the Battle of Seven Oaks where the flag of the Métis Nation was unfurled.

Canada's refusal to recognize the rights of the Métis led to the formation of the first Métis provisional government of Louis Riel that negotiated the entry of the Red River Settlement into Confederation as the province of Manitoba in 1870. Riel's second Métis provisional government was established in the Saskatchewan valley to secure Métis lands. It faced invasion by Canadian troops, forcing the Métis to defend themselves in the Northwest Resistance of 1885. With defeat at Batoche and the execution of our leader, Louis Riel, the Métis experienced dispossession, dispersion and marginalization.

Our political struggle to secure our lands and self-government as one of Canada's founding peoples continued. In 1928, the Métis Nation of Alberta was established and succeeded in pressuring the Province into establishing the Métis Settlements, to this day the only Métis land base in Canada. Other political organizations emerged on the prairies during this period. By the early 1970s these organizations began dealing with the federal government and in 1983 formed the Métis National Council, later to be expanded to take in the Métis of BC and Ontario.

Métis organization began strengthening their system of democratic accountability through province-wide ballot box election of leaders. They began to assume responsibility for delivering a variety of federal and provincial social and economic development programs to their members such as housing, employment and training, economic development, and family and child services.

At the same time, they continued to wage the struggle to fulfill our rights as a self-determining nation to land and resources and self-government within the Canadian federation. In 1981, the Manitoba Metis Federation launched a lawsuit against Canada and Manitoba over the unfulfilled sections of the Manitoba Act 1870 providing for Métis

lands in what is today southern Manitoba. That case recently reached the Supreme Court of Canada and its decision is sure to alter the political and legal landscape. The outcome of that case will also impact on other legal action we are taking to challenge the scrip system used to defraud the Métis of their lands in other parts of the prairies, northeastern BC and the Northwest Territories. In the Powley decision in 2003, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Métis were a full-fledged rights-bearing people with constitutionally protected harvesting rights. Our Governing Members continue to pursue the implementation of these rights through cases such as Hirshekorn in Alberta.

At the same time as we pursue the rights agenda, we are willing and eager to work with the federal and provincial governments on initiatives that improve the living conditions and economic opportunities of our people.

Economic development is one area where we are making progress, particularly in our ability to adopt policies and programs that respond to the varying circumstances of our population which, according to the most recent census, numbers about 400,000 people.

Some of our people live in predominantly Métis communities or mixed communities with significant Métis populations in the rural and hinterland areas of the mid-Canada corridor from northwestern Ontario across the north-central Prairies and into the Peace River district.

I come from Northwestern Saskatchewan which has numerous Métis-majority communities like Ile-a-la-Crosse and Buffalo Narrows.

Almost 70% of Métis live in urban centres, the largest concentrations being in

Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver , Calgary and Saskatoon. Urban Métis are twice as likely as urban non-Aboriginal people to live in smaller urban centres with a population of less than 100,000. The Métis make up a considerable share of the population in these smaller urban centres such as Cold Lake and Grande Prairie in Alberta and Dawson Creek and Prince George in British Columbia.

In addressing economic opportunities, we face a disadvantage relative to other Aboriginal peoples in our lack of a land and natural resource base. The exception is the Métis Settlements that have been able to leverage their ownership of their lands and their co-management of natural resource exploration and development to establish businesses and partnerships in the oil and gas sector.

Elsewhere, the Métis must depend to a large extent on a strong work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit.

In this, they have been supported by the MNC's Governing Members that have used their province-wide service delivery infrastructure as an asset to promote economic opportunity, often in partnership with industry and other governments.

Of all the operators of Aboriginal labor market and skills development programs previously known as AHRDAs and now as ASETS, the Métis Nation institutions are recognized as leaders.

In the critical area of training to employment, the province-wide network of Métis Employment Services centres in Alberta and the Skills and Employment Centre in Abbotsford, BC are critical in the development of our human resources.

We have made tremendous strides in increasing our labor force participation rate which is now approaching that of the general population.

We have also been expanding our business presence, thanks in part to the Métis capital corporations that make small business loans.

The financial services arm of the MNA, Apeetogosan (Métis) Development Inc., is regarded as the most successful Aboriginal capital corporation in Canada.

It has facilitated the creation and expansion of hundreds of Métis businesses that have generated thousands of jobs.

The MNA's Métis Urban Housing Corporation is the largest Section 95 Aboriginal housing program in Canada.

My task as national leader of the Métis Nation has been to build on the successful track record of the professionally managed and arms-length development institutions of our Governing Members.

In 2008, I and the Honorable Chuck Strahl, then the federal Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, signed the Métis Nation Protocol that set out a process for the Métis Nation and the federal government to work together on a number of issues.

This work led to a number of achievements in the area of economic development.

One was the establishment of a Métis Entrepreneurship Fund that will enable the Métis capital corporations to make larger loans.

We will hear more about this later this morning from some of our panel speakers.

We are also working on an economic development accord with the federal government that is directed toward expanding the capacity and responsibilities of our economic development corporations, as we will hear from a representative of the Government of Canada.

The Métis Nation Protocol also provides for the federal government and the Métis National Council to engage the five westernmost provincial governments on a range of issues - and the area where this has been best achieved is economic development.

The Métis Nation has joined with the federal minister and his counterparts from the five provinces at two summits in 2009 and 2011 where we have discussed ways to cooperate on Métis Nation economic development.

Our senior officials and industry representatives have followed up with more detailed discussions on how we can work together on matters such as procurement, laborforce development, access to capital, and partnerships.

During this period, the federal government and some of the provinces jointly invested in a number of our corporations that provide equity capital to Métis businesses and communities.

At the last meeting at the ministerial level, we agreed that a Métis Nation Economic Development Strategy should be developed by 2013 that could guide future collaborative efforts.

In order to develop this Strategy, we agreed that a series of regional engagement sessions including this one today should be held and the emphasis should be placed on how to engage industry in partnerships with our communities, businesses, and economic development institutions.

Ledcor Industries, which has been partnering with the Manitoba Metis Federation on a number of economic projects, has also been working alongside us in these regional engagement sessions to focus participants on ways industry and the Métis Nation can collaborate on various ventures to our mutual benefit, as we will soon hear from George Desmairais.

Over the next two days, we will also hear from a number of other corporations on their approaches to partnerships with the Métis Nation.

We will also hear from governments, industry and Métis Nation economic development institutions on the types of procurement and laborforce development policies that are being pursued or considered to makes these partnerships work.

A key driver of economic development in western Canada will be major energy and resource development projects and it is no coincidence that this summit is being held along the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline route.

Northern Gateway will have a major impact on our communities in Alberta and BC, posing challenges and opportunities.

One of our panels is dedicated to this project, with representatives from Enbridge Pipelines, the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis Nation British Columbia, offering their perspectives.

Finally, we will have the opportunity to listen to a number of guest speakers with compelling messages for our conference.

Doug Golosky, a Métis entrepreneur from Fort McMurray who has built a corporate empire out of ingenuity and hard work, will speak to the changing environments of the economy in today's keynote luncheon address.

Tomorrow, Jason Madden, a lawyer who has distinguished himself in cases involving Métis rights, will address the Duty to Consult and the related questions of what constitutes effective consultation and effective accommodation based on the experience of various Métis communities.

These questions speak to the challenges and opportunities we face in the Métis political movement today when we deal with economic development.

We are a people with a strong entrepreneurial tradition who wish to fully participate in a growing economy but at the same time we expect to be fully consulted and accommodated on major economic projects affecting our traditional lands

There is nothing contradictory in that; the Duty to Consult and accommodate should be a driver of, not an obstacle to, economic development for our people.

But this requires the Crown and industry to recognize and respect our rights and interests.

So on that note, I look forward to this conference as the next important step in developing a strategy that can guide us forward into the economy of the future.

In closing, I wish to pay special tribute to one of the leaders of the Métis Nation who is not speaking on any particular topic but whose strong business sense and vision of a prosperous future for her people has shaped so much of the progress in Métis social and economic development in the province of Alberta. The unique Métis heritage and tourism site at Métis Crossing, innovations in urban housing, endowment funds providing students with financial support for post-secondary education, and now the Rupertsland Institute as a centre of excellence in skills development – all of these achievements speak to the vision and dedication of Audrey Poitras.

I salute you Audrey.

These regional engagement sessions across the Métis homeland will conclude with a Métis Nation-Industry roundtable next year in Calgary. Here, the findings from these sessions and partnership relationships being developed can be assessed and a direction set for expanding Métis participation in the economy.