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CANADIENS

OCT 05 1984

DOCUMENT: 830-143/011

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL MEETING OF MINISTERS  
ON ABORIGINAL CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

OPENING REMARKS

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FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL MINISTERS' MEETING ON

ABORIGINAL CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS

Metis National Council

Toronto, Ontario

February 13-14, 1984

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METIS NATIONAL COUNCIL

The Metis National Council is willing to enter into the cross-country consultation process as an equal participant. First, however, steps must be taken to ensure that the obstacles blocking the equal treatment of Metis relative to other peoples are removed. We see the main purpose of this year's First Ministers' Conference to be the removal of these obstacles in the following areas:

1. Metis Self-Identification

The Metis are the only aboriginal people whose very identity is challenged at the table. Governments have made it clear that despite Section 35(2) they cannot OPENING REMARKS until they know who the Metis are and how many there are. This year we have told you in no uncertain terms who we are and where we are and have put forward principles for an agreement on Metis self-identification and recognition which we believe must be built into a political accord at the First Ministers' Conference.

We would **FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL MINISTERS' MEETING ON** **ABORIGINAL CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS** like to instruct officials to draft an accord on Metis self-identification for presentation to the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. We refuse to slip into a negotiation process attached to a bill and chain of equal-recognition. Let us move to an accord on Metis self-identification so the Metis people can feel assured that their integrity is respected. Without this basic human respect, how can we be expected to place faith in the process?

Toronto, Ontario

February 13-14, 1984

METIS NATIONAL COUNCIL

The Metis National Council is willing to enter into the community consultation process as an equal participant. First, however, steps must be taken to ensure that the obstacles blocking the equal treatment of Metis relative to other peoples are removed. We see the main purpose of this year's First Ministers' Conference to be the removal of these obstacles in the following areas:

I. Metis Self-Identification

The Metis are the only aboriginal people whose very identity is challenged at the table. Governments have made it clear that despite Section 35(2) they cannot recognize Metis rights until they know who the Metis are and how many there are. This year we have told you in no uncertain terms who we are and where we are and have put forward principles for an agreement on Metis self-identification and enumeration which we believe must be built into a political accord at the First Ministers' Conference.

We would like this meeting of ministers and aboriginal representatives to instruct officials to draft an accord on Metis self-identification for presentation to the First Ministers' Conference. As we told the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, we refuse to limp into a negotiation process attached to a ball and chain of quasi-recognition. Let us move to an accord on Metis self-identification so the Metis people can feel assured that their integrity is respected. Without this basic human respect, how can we be expected to place faith in the process?

2. Metis Land Base

In order to meaningfully participate in a community negotiation approach to self-government, we must have some movement on a land base. Without a Metis land base, there can be no Metis self-government. We have tabled our position on the creation of a Metis land base through government-Metis land transfer agreements which would be constitutionalized under Section 35(3) of the Constitution Act.

Without prejudice to any claims we may wish to pursue in the courts, we are not at this table to debate whether or not we have an existing aboriginal right to land. From the beginning of this process, we have informed you that we want our rights as an aboriginal people to be defined through political negotiation, not court interpretation. If these negotiations are to have any chance of success, there must be political will on the part of governments to deal with the continued landlessness of the Metis people.

Metis Self-Government

Self-government is the key issue which must be addressed both here and at the First Ministers' Conference. The Constitutional Accord signed at the last First Ministers' Conference clearly specified that this issue would be addressed in a substantive way prior to the 1984 conference. We have put forward our positions on this item in the Working Group. We are looking for the entrenchment of a right to self-government. And we believe that with sufficient political will, agreement to entrench a right to self-government could be achieved at the upcoming First Ministers' Conference.

We recognize that the implementation of Metis self-government will take time and would have to be negotiated with governments and with the Metis people. Our proposal on self-government is flexible. We have provided three options by which Metis governments could be provided with jurisdiction. We recognize that this matter would have to be the subject of complex and detailed negotiations subsequent to the First Ministers' Conference.

However, we have yet to receive the reaction of governments to our proposal. We would hope at this meeting that Ministers would indicate which of our options for implementation of self-government they prefer. This meeting should also consider modifications to these options if need be. We would however hope that a consensus would develop on at least one of these options to enable work to proceed on it prior to the First Ministers' Conference.