



BC Métis
FEDERATION

BC Métis Federation Decries Hate Speech and Intolerance of the Métis in British Columbia

Transcription of media event broadcasted
live on Tuesday, June 20, 2023

[Link to video recording of the media event](#)

Event Host

- Greg Mazur

Speakers

- Keith Henry - President, BC Métis Federation
- Malcolm Macpherson - Partner, Clark Wilson LLP
- Earl Belcourt - Treasurer, BC Métis Federation
- Joe Desjarlais - Director of Research, BC Métis Federation

Transcription

Greg Mazur

Good morning and welcome to the British Columbia Métis Federation Office on this day before National Indigenous Day. My name is Greg Mazur, I'm Director of Industry Engagement with BCMF and I would like to introduce our head table here.

We've got Keith Henry as President of the BC Métis Federation. Malcolm Macpherson our legal counsel. Joe Desjarlais Director of Research and Earl Belcourt as a Director of the BC Métis Federation.

We would like you to join us today as we address the resolution from the union of BC Indian Chiefs and our formal response to the letter.

I will now ask Keith Henry to give his remarks and response to the letter, followed by Malcolm. Joe will give background on research pertinent to the letter and followed up by a response from the Federation by Earl Belcourt. After that we will address any questions others may have. Thank you for joining us.

Keith Henry

Thanks Greg. I want to start by acknowledging the territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tseil-Waututh People as this is where our office is located. I say that to the members and partners watching today with great emphasis today.

The Federation as we've evolved over the last 10 plus years has always honored, respected, and recognized First Nation Territory and protocol. Having said that, what brought us to this place today where the Federation has taken a very strong stand on behalf our membership and of course what we perceive many Métis people in the province of British Columbia is resolution number 2023-39 Rejection and Denouncement of Métis colonialism in British Columbia and the Crowns past and ongoing facilitation of it.

So, this past week many of our members and partners would have seen through the BC Métis Federation an initial statement released last Wednesday. That was in a response to members contacting us, asking us if we saw the resolution that was denouncing our... There are many pieces of the resolution I'll just quickly touch on. There's been an evolution of how we got here from a public statement.

We did send a letter on Friday to the BC Indian Chief's chief council. We have asked them to retract this resolution and have 14 days to do so, or the Federation will enact the next steps in either a legal or human rights claim, or process and we will let that unfold as it should. Now this is about some very specific things. We are not saying Métis are trying to take anything from First Nations. We have never said that. We believe we honor protocol with that.

What we do know in British Columbia, for as long as I've been in this province for 20 plus years, there's been this perception that there's a hierarchy of Indigenous rights. In the hierarchy of Indigenous Peoples is First Nations, Non-Status, Urban Indigenous, and somewhere below that is Métis.

Section 35 identifies three groups. First Nation, Métis, and Inuit. We are Métis and we are section 35 people. We're not trying to be First Nations. We are not trying to take any rights. We are not trying to take any money. We are just trying to ensure our children and families have the right cultural awareness of who they are and where they come from.

We enact on that through a series of support from several Métis communities that are very active today all throughout this province.

What bothered us the most in this resolution that the leadership council passed were things that were communicated from some of the First Nations leadership groups to the province of BC. We do not believe this is a position of all First Nations.

I myself have worked with many great First Nation leadership in this province. There's 200 plus communities, and several strong First Nation partners that I have had the pleasure of working with for some time. We hope this is simply a matter of a handful of First Nation leaders that are advocating a certain narrative.

One of which is to fear monger that if somehow, Métis are recognized, that they're going to lose something. Which we do not believe this to be the case at all.

So, what worries us is the resolution as now they are writing part of the resolution to address to the provincial government and continue to address the importance of removing Métis from proper consultation on any sorts of projects.

As we know, through the regulatory process, Métis are part of that. There's a real disconnect between the distinction-based approach of the federal government which we agree with in policy, versus what First Nations are continuing to advance with the province of BC. They are asking for the province to somehow apologize for past correspondence etc.

Other pieces of concern in that resolution is there's a specific statement, a number of statements. The resolution states they denounce the past in continuing false, unfounded, and offensive assertions of the Métis of land and water based constitutionally protected rights in BC. We do not believe it's unfounded.

We believe that part of our efforts to reclaim Métis identity and our history through the Pacific North-West, which we will discuss shortly, are founded. We are doing that research. We are not doing this in isolation or without education and academic background research.

The other piece that really concerns me are statements like the UBCIC Chief's chief council forcibly reaffirms that the Métis hold no land. We don't know what the word forcibly means, and I do not think those First Nations that are in these groups that are talking about that recognize how we might interpret that as Métis people.

Does that mean they are going to take up arms? Are they going to forcibly attack our people? Are they going to forcibly attack our representatives?

Because it's happened. It's been happening for years. Our BC Métis Federation representatives on various committees, various panels, continue to face a certain stereotype and a certain attack by some of the leadership within the First Nations

communities that seem to think that it's an ok thing to do. We think that is completely wrong.

We think that language is dangerous and needs to be addressed.

Another line states that they reject and denounce any and all forms of Métis colonialism in BC.

We are not colonizers. We are trying to desperately maintain our culture, language, and traditions. No different than First Nations from across British Columbia and Canada doing every single day. Our families, our language.

We do not talk about it enough in British Columbia, the Michif language and whichever dialect it is.

These are things we are addressing each and every day. I hope people come to realize that we are not colonizers. We have been colonized. No different than First Nations across this country.

We hope that from the leadership group that the letter we sent out to the union of BC Indian Chiefs and hope that they reflect. Sadly, we know now that this resolution was not in isolation, that the First Nations summit and the First Nations Leadership Council are now working to accept a similar resolution.

We understand that we have different political views, and we understand that First Nation leaders may be threatened by, for whichever reason, the Métis finding their identity and reclaim who they are in this province.

The truth is, we believe that they can coexist. Now we are not here to take anything away from any other Indigenous community. So, we will continue to follow this up. Continue to be strong on behalf of our members. I want to thank our leadership group in the BC Métis Federation.

I've got Earl Belcourt here with me, one of our elected leaders in the province of BC from our board. We have taken a strong stance and we feel whether we hate language or discriminatory language, none of it is acceptable.

I will end with this story. One of my sons went to school in North Vancouver. Year after year, we constantly identified him as Métis on registration forms. We know the school district signed an enhancement agreement.

I am a proud Métis person, but the system never provided him Métis cultural support unless I personally brought it in and paid for it. Yet, I question myself when I see this kind of... negative social economic impacts when leadership has got everyone the province on the First Nations side. Talking about the Métis not existing or never have existed.

Making people feel that they are non-indigenous, that if they don't just support First Nation issues, then somehow, it's wrong.

That's not right. Reconciliation needs to include Métis people in this province. When my son went through school and continues through school, he deserves cultural education that is no different than First Nations children.

So, we need to be strong as Métis leaders to say that we are not here to take anything away from the First Nations kids in that example. But what I am saying is that my son deserves Métis cultural education, and it is not up to First Nations leadership to say otherwise. It's up to me, my family, and my community. We need to get past that narrative. Those are my closing statements Greg.

Greg Mazur

Thank you very much Keith. Malcolm, can I ask you as legal counsel for your response to this resolution.

Malcolm Macpherson

Good morning everyone, I hope you can hear me. My name is Malcolm Macpherson and I am a lawyer at Clark Wilson LLP. I'm here today to address the impacts of UBCIC resolution 2023-39.

This resolution is most concerning because it advocates the narrative that Métis have no section 35 protected rights in the province of British Columbia. Said another way, the UBCIC resolution in lay terms states that the Métis in BC have no more rights than any other non-indigenous Canadians in British Columbia. Pronouncements such as these are demeaning, dehumanizing, and contrary to the historical record.

The world in 2023 sadly is more divided than ever. We must collectively call-out intolerance whenever we see it rear its head. There is uncontroverted evidence that Métis inhabited and continue to inhabit many parts of modern-day British Columbia. Long before the assertion of British sovereignty.

For the UBCIC Chief Council to say, as it does in the resolution, that this isn't so and is to fundamentally deny Indigenous collective memory of one of Canada's founding peoples. To deny Indigenous collective memory is no small matter.

It has the effect of saying "You weren't here. You're a liar. You don't belong." In the UBCIC resolution's own words, they say, quote "The Métis have continued to fail to be good guests in our territories." End quote.

This is why UBCIC resolution number 2023-39 is so dehumanizing. It has the effect of the outright denial of the very existence of the Métis in British Columbia. At its core the resolution, in so many words, says the Métis in BC are unrecognizable and you are imposters.

Now some might say this amounts to a form of hatred. There's quite a good definition of the meaning of hatred that was penned by then Chief Justice Dixon in 1990, and that was a Supreme Court decision R versus Keigstra. It spoke about hatred, I'll bet with confidence of the criminal code, and this is what Chief Justice Dixon had to say about hatred.

He said "Hatred is predicated on destruction, and hatred against identifiable groups therefore thrives on insensitivity, bigotry, and both destruction of the target group and the values of our society. Hatred in this sense is the most extreme emotion that belies reason and emotion matters. If exercised against the members of an identifiable group implies that those individuals are to be despised, scorn, denied respect, and made subject to ill treatment on the basis of group affiliation."

In closing, UBCIC resolution number 2023-39 is contrary to the truth. Everyone who has read some history knows that the Métis were the backbone of the fur trade.

They preceded and literally helped build the forts and the posts which opened modern day British Columbia to what amounts to international trade.

The Métis were here, and that truth cannot be denied. Thank you for listening and I will now turn it over to Joe Desjarlais.

Joe Desjarlais

Thank you Malcolm. Good morning everyone, my name is Joe Desjarlais and I'm the Director of Research at the BC Métis Federation. At the BC Métis Federation, we are community-based research and education.

Our goal is to repatriate the Pacific North-West Métis history. We partner with our local communities in knowledge partnerships to build this capacity, so they have a unity in a Métis voice in the Pacific North-West. It really is about relationship building.

This informs cultural initiatives like Project Coming Home and other initiatives we have. This has to be built on diligence and community knowledge just to agree on the idea that the Métis come from somewhere else and don't have a place in BC. The Métis have a long-storied history experienced in BC.

First Nations cannot deny mixed ancestry self-determination in the Pacific North-West. The existence of these self-determining Métis kinship networks. Communities. They also cannot deny a shared history with First Nations and this is what our handouts referred to, on the land and water. Métis self-determine according to place.

We also share, unfortunately, a history of racialization and discrimination. Subjugation. We did not write this report to offend First Nations. To trespass on your sovereignty. Or to diminish their self-determination. Our hope is to respect and honor each other's histories and move toward respectful dialogue and neutral recognition. Thank you.

Greg Mazur

Thank you very much Joe. Now I would like to invite Earl Belcourt as a Director of the BC Métis Federation.

Earl Belcourt

Thanks there Greg. Good morning everyone. As a Director of the British Columbia Métis Federation, I find it insulting and demeaning to have anyone tell me who I am. I've been in BC now on Vancouver Island for 33 years. I've never had issues although there were words in the background but nothing else since, until this letter came out.

I have been involved with the Indigenous Advisory Monitoring Committee for 6 years now and we don't have issues on that committee. Unless the course is going to change, who knows because this letter here has opened a can of worms that we don't know what to expect anymore.

I'm also involved in the Indigenous Centre for Cumulative Effects in Ottawa which involves everybody including the Inuit, First Nations of course, the Métis. Now where that is going to take us, I have no idea right now. I'm looking forward to finding out soon as I have things to do as well, we all do.

It would be prudent of the First Nations to sit down with our President and Vice President and our lawyer to discuss the future of our province. We are a part of Canada and always have been, always will be.

As the First Nations have always said it before, just wait awhile and they'll disappear. Well, they said things about the Métis and yet we are still here. Stronger than ever actually.

So my suggestion to anyone who wants to debate this letter, I suggest you contact the President and our lawyer Malcolm Macpherson and get this over with as we have business to take care of and we want to work with you. Thank you very much.

Greg Mazur

Thank you very much. That brings to a close our presentation this morning. Thank you very much for joining us. We have handouts here for everyone. We can take any questions now; and look forward to it. Thank you very much head table Keith, Malcolm, Joe, Earl. They have been wonderful. We will be signing off now.

Keith Henry

Shortly. I want to make a few closing comments to our members online. I think you've heard a different sort of series of commentary about this. Ultimately what we want is a solution.

We don't want to end up in conflict with any First Nations in the province of BC. The truth is, whether it's Earl's story of being here for the last 33 years, or my family that has been here for the last 20. But here's a Pacific North-West story yet to be told. By reconciling that history as Joe referenced earlier as our Director of Research, that should be part of reconciliation.

We want First Nations to understand that's part of our need for our cultural identity. It's not about money. It's not about power. We have to be reasonable and understand that this road to reconciliation is challenging, complex.

Leaving Métis people out of conversations or forced as some sort of degenerates is not the answer. The UBCIC resolution did exactly all of those things. I know because I took all the emails and phone calls from our members. People felt dehumanized, people felt hurt. People felt like they were embarrassed to be Métis in this province.

We are here to say that's wrong. We're here to hope that First Nations leadership will turn down the temperature. We'll sit down. We have been offering protocol agreements since 2014/2015.

It is time to really sort this out. We shouldn't wait for governments to solve it for us. We should solve it as Indigenous people.

So, I just want to end with this. I don't think it's fair to call us colonizers when at the root of this, as Indigenous people most of us in our families know, there were times when you sat around the table and just dealt with things. Before it went into the public eye.

We didn't force this here. It was forced on us.

So we hope that First Nations leadership will think about that and if they're watching, we want them to work together with us and help us help you understand and we can understand your needs.

We absolutely want to see something good come from that.

So to the members. Be aware we will continue to walk down this path, hopefully towards resolution.

Thank you for being with us today.