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ALLOCUTION – MARC ARNAL

Célébration de commémoration pour la Journée Louis Riel
16 novembre 2018

Respected knowledge people,
President Poitras,
Members of the Metis nation,
Members of government and of the legislature,
Chers amis francophones,
Chers amis,

This won't be long but I have three topics to discuss briefly.

To introduce the first, I will read a few lines from a paper by
Father Guy Lavallée a Metis from Saint-Laurent, Manitoba:

"To speak "proper" Canadian French was to be superior to those
who did not. In their eyes, Michif French, as a language, did not
have a status in its own right. As a non-standard form of the
language, it was considered a bastardized language, a corruption
of Canadian French. Teachers apparently targeted immediately
Michif French as an impediment to assimilation.

And the Metis people quickly became conscious that their
language, Michif French, was being portrayed to them as an

inferior language. There was a social stigma attached to being Métis and to speaking Michif French, especially in inter-ethnic circles and interactions. Thus, for some Metis people, being Metis and speaking Michif French became a source of inferiority and shame. As a result, the influence of the missionaries and Bretons in trying to establish Canadian French as the first language in the community had a negative impact on the Metis People.”

My first objective is to apologize on behalf of our communities and beg your forgiveness. Without this generous gesture on your part, the rest of what I will say would be irrelevant.

The second point is about symbolism. Sometimes, it just slaps you in the face. When I go visit my 99 year-old mother, I always stop by the cemetery of the St-Boniface cathedral, short steps from where I was educated. Next to the resting place of Louis Riel is a beautiful headstone in recognition of Chief One Perrow who fought with Riel and Dumont and the leaders of the Rebellion. The provincial government had adopted a list of rights and official recognition of French and English. French Catholic cemetery, Metis leader and First People Chiefs are watching together. Sometimes we are like Québec, “je me souviens”, but we have short memories.

Today we need to work together as Romeo Saganash reminded us at our recent AGM. If we talk to each other respectfully in a spirit of forgiveness, we will find common objectives.

March is the Alberta Francophonie Month. Our flag is a recognized symbol by the Government of Alberta and on March 20, I would like to see our two flags flying together, as two symbols of fraternal respect, love and caring.

If I stand here today as the President of the Francophone Association of Alberta, it is in large part due to the courage, the vision and the blood of great Metis leaders.

Merci de votre attention et bonne journée à tous.