

JOINING THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* invites us to walk together in 'a movement of the Australian people for a better future'.

At a significant juncture in a struggle for recognition that has lasted more than 230 years, the Statement gifts Australian people with a clear path forward, starting with a Voice to Parliament protected in the Constitution.

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW accepts the Statement's invitation and is proud to support its calls for the long overdue reforms.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNITION

Think about the importance that being recognised plays in all our lives. From our earliest years, being recognised, accepted, and included affirms our human dignity. It nurtures the growth of our identity, gives us a voice, and encourages our unique contribution to society. Whether it's in day-to-day meetings or the more important events of our lives, when we come together, we look into the eyes of another and pay our respects. We share our story and walk together with a shared purpose.

We also know the experience of being ignored or rejected out of hand and how that undermines our worth and our ability to speak and make ourselves heard.

Imagine then the experience of the First Nations peoples of Australia who were dispossessed and dominated since the first days of British colonisation. Their lands were invaded, they suffered death and disease, their children were stolen, and they were pushed onto missions, enslaved and incarcerated. And more than

this, sovereignty and the expression of an ancient living culture were denied. The powerlessness of not having a voice or the right of self-determination remains as unfinished business that Australia must address.

When we meet as Vincentians, we acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land. This is more than just words – it is the first step in acknowledging the dignity of the First Peoples who have lived and cared for this land since time immemorial. We recognise the unique beauty and spiritual depth of First Nations culture and intimate ancestral ties to country for over 60,000 years. We recognise the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the face of the many hardships they have endured.

We join in the ongoing struggle of First Nations peoples to have a voice and to be heard.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country... We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.¹

– Uluru Statement

The Society of St Vincent de Paul supports the call of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* for the Constitutional recognition of First Nations people and an enshrined and protected National Voice to Parliament.² And we are not alone. The Australian Catholic Bishops and the Religious Orders through Catholic Religious Australia are among many church and community groups joining the call.³



THE LONG STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

The call of this landmark Statement is not new. It is the culmination of the long struggle for recognition that goes back to the arrival of the First Fleet.

Aboriginal resistance sought to defend sovereignty and protect vulnerable communities being forced from their land. Conflict often escalated into bloody frontier wars, including massacres, as the British expanded outwards from Sydney.

Jenifer Newman, a Wiradjuri woman, academic and historian, has highlighted the long-lasting struggle of First Nations people for recognition, and the timeline to the right draws on her work.

A NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE VOICE

In recent decades there have been a number of Indigenous national representative organisations that have come and gone, subject to the funding and support of governments – including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and its Regional Councils (1990–2005) and the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (2009–2019). That these representative bodies are so vulnerable to the whim of party politics and political cycles has given rise to the First Nations call for a Constitutionally enshrined representative voice.

Over the past decade we have witnessed exhaustive nation-wide consultations on the Constitutional recognition of Australia's First Peoples, which has been accepted by so many but rejected out of hand by the Government of the day.¹⁰

Recognition and a real voice in decision-making is so close, and yet seems to elude the First Peoples of Australia and every Australian.

Professor Megan Davis, Aboriginal activist and Human Rights lawyer, has spoken of the importance of a people's movement supporting the Uluru call:

Uluru is a game changer. The response of ordinary Australians to the Uluru Statement has been overwhelming. The statement is a rallying call to the Australian people to 'walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future', so together we can shift the politicians who are paralysed by the short-term party politics that are so common in liberal democratic governance.¹¹

1824 The warrior Windradyne led a delegation of over 260 from the Central West to Parramatta to negotiate with the Governor in the face of British expansion.⁴

1835 In Melbourne, eight Kulin leaders met with grazier John Batman to negotiate a treaty for the use of land. While short-lived, it was an expression of Aboriginal sovereignty and the right to negotiate with decision-making power.⁵

1933 Sydney Elder Joe Anderson, called out the poor treatment and evictions of the Aborigines Protection Board. He promoted the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association's petition calling for the vote, land rights and formal recognition.

*Before the white man set foot in Australia, my ancestors had kings in their own right, and I, Aboriginal King Burruga, am a direct descendant of the royal line... I am calling a corroboree of all the natives of New South Wales to send a petition to the King in an endeavour to improve our condition. All the black man wants is representation in Federal Parliament.*⁶

1938 The Aboriginal Progressive Association declared a Day of Mourning to highlight the plight of Aboriginal people and campaign for full citizenship and land rights.⁷

1963 The Yolngu People in eastern Arnhem Land sought legal recognition of their land and sea rights in the face of a mining development that would denigrate their sacred sites.

1967 Over 90 per cent of Australians voted in the 1967 Referendum to give Government power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to recognise First Nations peoples in the Census.

1972 Following the rejection of the Yolngu native title claims the Tent Embassy was set up in front of Federal Parliament House⁸ - an enduring expression of First Nations' sovereignty.

1975 Prime Minister Gough Whitlam travelled north to meet Vincent Lingiari following the Commonwealth's recognition of the land claim of Gurindji.

[T]hese lands belong to the Gurindji people and I put into your hands this piece of earth itself as a sign that we restore them to you and your children forever.

– Gough Whitlam

*Let us live happily together as mates, let us not make it hard for each other... They took our country away from us, now they have brought it back ceremonially.*⁹

– Vincent Lingiari

1992 The historic High Court Mabo decision paved the way for Native Title in this country.

NOW IS THE TIME

We know well the material hardship experienced by First Nations peoples. One in five people seeking the support of Vinnies NSW identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.¹² They are over-represented in almost every indicator of social and economic disadvantage, with disastrously high imprisonment rates, lower life expectancy, poorer health, education and employment.

And we know that this hardship is entwined with over 230 years of colonisation, dispossession and having little say in the decision-making institutions of our society. The Australian community's response to the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* needs to address the structural nature of the problem. It is time for Constitutional recognition with strong symbolic and practical power to address 'the torment of our powerlessness'.

The call of the Uluru Statement comes from the heart. Our response needs also to come from the heart.

As Church . . .

We know that our communion is incomplete without full recognition of our First Nations sisters and brothers and the gift of their ancient culture.

Visiting Australia in 1986, Pope John Paul II traveled to the heart of the country and met with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who had gathered from around the nation. The Pope spoke of the impact of colonisation on traditional culture and through enduring disadvantage. He called for social justice and urged First Nations to actively seek agreements that acknowledge their identity and right to participate in the life of the community.

Certainly, what has been done cannot be undone. But what can now be done to remedy the deeds of yesterday must not be put off till tomorrow... the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.¹³

– Pope John Paul II



As Vincentians . . .

At the heart of the Society of St Vincent de Paul is our commitment to seek out and support the most vulnerable. In our good works, we encounter Christ in the poor and share his compassionate and liberating love. No work of charity is foreign to us and we serve those in need regardless of creed, background, health, gender, or political opinions.

We go to the margins to find the victims of exclusion or adversity. More than the material assistance we provide, we identify the unjust structures that cause poverty and hardship in the first place. Where injustice, inequality, poverty or exclusion are due to unjust structures, the Society speaks out. We help the poor and disadvantaged speak out, and when their voice is not heard, we advocate.¹⁴

As we say in our Reconciliation Action Plan:

We seek positive and enduring relationships with First Nations Peoples and will use our reputation and influence to advocate for stronger recognition and respect for culture, community, and equal opportunity.¹⁵

As Citizens of Australia . . .

We have this wonderful opportunity to walk with First Nations people – to join the call for the recognition they have struggled for since 1788.

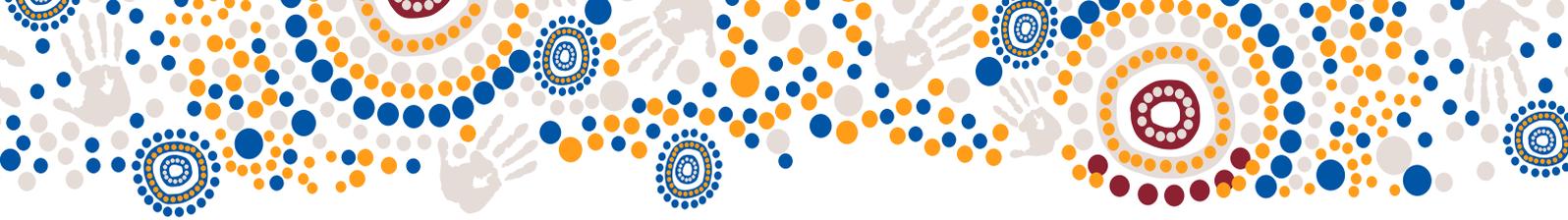
Constitutional recognition will acknowledge and respect the dignity of First Nations peoples and culture. A Voice to Parliament that cannot be defunded or removed will empower First Nations people in the eradication of poverty and hardship. Makarrata – *the coming together after a struggle* – will ensure respectful relationships and truth telling in the shared history of Australia.

In April 2022, the largest gathering of First Nations leaders since the Uluru Statement, released the *Yarrabah Affirmation* – calling for a referendum for a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament.¹⁶

The outcome is important for all of us. Without recognition of the First Nations, we are all diminished. Let's ensure our children and grandchildren can live in a nation that has come to terms with a violent past. Let's join this real endeavour of nationhood and walk together with hope for the future.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.¹⁷

– Uluru Statement



ACTIONS WE CAN TAKE:

✔ Read the Uluru Statement from the Heart:

<https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/>

✔ Add your name in support of the Statement at:

<https://fromtheheart.com.au/signtheulurustatementcanvas/>

✔ Access the Vinnies NSW Reconciliation Action Plan:

https://www.vinnies.org.au/page/Publications/NSW/Reconciliation_Action_Plan/

✔ Sign up to the Vinnies Social Justice Network to receive updates on the campaign for recognition:

<https://socialjustice.vinnies.org.au/join/>

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- ¹ National Constitutional Convention (2017), *Uluru Statement from the Heart*.
 - ² St Vincent de Paul Society (2021), *Vinnies NSW welcomes Uluru Statement from the Heart recognition*. Media release 27 May 2021.
 - ³ Catholic Religious Australia (2021), *CRA calls for Enshrinement of an Indigenous Voice in the Australian Constitution*. Media release 7 April 2021; Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (2021), *Bishops endorse Uluru Statement from the Heart*. Media release 22 November 2021.
 - ⁴ The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser (1824), *The Aborigines*. 30 December 1824, p.2 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/2183548/495006>
 - ⁵ Jennifer Newman (2014) 'Radical hope – surprising will', *Settler Colonial Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp 359–360 4:4, 357-367, DOI: 10.1080/2201473X.2014.911652,
 - ⁶ Jennifer Newman (2020), *Uluru Statement from the Heart*. Presentation to Woollahra Municipal Council, 17 June 2020 <https://vimeo.com/458389181>; Heather Goodall & Allison Cadzow (2014), *Aboriginal People on Sydney's Georges River from 1820*. Dictionary of Sydney https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/aboriginal_people_on_sydney's_georges_river_from_1820. Accessed 16 April 2022; National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (1983), *Lousy Little Sixpence: Send a petition to the King*. NFSA ID: 9408 <https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/lousy-little-sixpence-send-petition-king>. Accessed 16 April 2022.
 - ⁷ J Korff (2022), *Aboriginal timeline: Protest*. Creativespirits <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/australian-aboriginal-history-timeline/protest>, Accessed 16 April 2022.
 - ⁸ Nyoongar Tent Embassy (2022), *Yirrkala Bark Petitions*. <https://www.nyoongartentembassy.com/yirrkala-bark-petitions.html>, Accessed 16 April 2022.
 - ⁹ Sally Warhaft (2004), *Well May We Say...The Speeches that made Australia*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2004, pp. 343-4.
 - ¹⁰ The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP, Prime Minister; Senator The Hon. George Brandis QC, Attorney-General; Senator The Hon. Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs (2017), *Response to Referendum Council's report on Constitutional Recognition*. Joint Media release 26 October 2017. https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/media/pressrel/5596294/upload_binary/5596294.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22media/pressrel/5596294%22
 - ¹¹ Megan Davis (2017), 'The long road to Uluru: Walking together – truth before justice', Essay in: *First Things First*, Griffith Review, Edition 60.
 - ¹² Society of St Vincent de Paul (2021), *Indigenous voice co-design interim report*, Submission to the Minister for Indigenous Australians, National Council of Australia Inc. p.2
 - ¹³ Pope John Paul II (1986), *To the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in 'Blatherskite Park'*. Address at Alice Springs 29 November 1986
 - ¹⁴ Society of St Vincent de Paul (2014), *The Rule – Australia*, 7th Edition 2012, amended 2014 nn. 1.1 – 1.6, 2.5, 7.1 – 7.9.
 - ¹⁵ Society of St Vincent de Paul NSW (2021), *Innovate: Reconciliation Action Plan*, August 2021 – August 2023, p.8
 - ¹⁶ Dan Butler (2022), *Yarrabah Affirmation calls for Voice referendum in next parliamentary term*, NITV News 11 April 2022
 - ¹⁷ National Constitutional Convention (2017), *Uluru Statement from the Heart*.