



ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remains attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Proportionally, we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal people. Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This

cannot be because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the *torment of our peoplehood*.

We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We have come on 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.

EXPLAINER:

ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

WHAT IS THE ULURU STATEMENT?

The Uluru Statement from the Heart (*the Statement*) is an invitation from First Nations peoples to non-Indigenous Australians to walk together for a better future. It was developed in 2017 after a long and extensive deliberation process by First Nations delegates across Australia.

The Statement calls for real and practical change through the establishment of a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament and a Makarrata Commission to undertake processes of treaty-making and truth-telling.¹ Makarrata is a multi-layered Yolgnu word understood as the coming together after a struggle to heal the divisions of the past.²

The Statement's agenda is represented by the three elements of Voice, Truth and Treaty:

- **Voice** – a constitutionally enshrined representative body to provide expert advice to Parliament about laws and policies that impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- **Treaty** – a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations that formally recognises ancient sovereignty, and that land was never ceded.
- **Truth** – a process to expose the full extent of the past injustices experienced by Aboriginal people and to arrive at a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia about Australia's history.³

¹ From the Heart (website) accessed 03/08/22 at <https://fromtheheart.com.au/>
² Walking Together Project (2022) *Train the trainer manual*, Youth Off The Streets, Sydney.
³ Walking Together Project (2022) *Train the trainer manual*, Youth Off The Streets, Sydney.



WHY DOES VOICE, TREATY, TRUTH MATTER?

In order to heal and grow as a nation, we need to acknowledge the wrongs of the past and seek to make things right. The truth-telling and treaty-making processes will provide an opportunity for First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous Australians to come together to make things right for a better future. This pathway to healing and peace saw the Statement awarded the Sydney Peace Prize in 2021.⁴

Establishing a Voice to give First Nations peoples a direct say over laws and policies that impact them will see better outcomes in areas like health, education and employment. Vinnies know well the material hardship experienced by First Nations peoples and we know this hardship is entwined with over 230 years of colonisation, dispossession and having little say in the decision-making.

The new Federal government has committed to holding a referendum on the Voice within its first parliamentary term. The Prime Minister has proposed the draft referendum question would ask, “Do you support an alteration to the Constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?” Giving the Voice a constitutional guarantee through a referendum will create a shared, unifying moment in our nation’s history that we can all be proud of.⁵



WHAT IS THE SOCIETY’S POSITION ON THE STATEMENT?

We have this wonderful opportunity to walk with First Nations people in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

The Society of St Vincent de Paul NSW accepts the Statement’s invitation and is proud to support its calls for an enshrined and protected National Voice to Parliament.⁶ The Catholic Church officially endorsed the Statement at the Fifth Plenary Council in July 2022.⁷

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE ULURU STATEMENT?

You can find out more about the Statement and familiarise yourself with Voice, Truth and Treaty at: <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement>

You can also read the Society’s statement, *Joining the Struggle for Recognition*, at: https://www.vinnies.org.au/page/Publications/NSW/Vinnies_Social_Justice_Statement/Joining_the_Struggle_for_Recognition

Contact the Vinnies Social Justice Team for further resources or for assistance to take action in support of the Statement at: social.justice@vinnies.org.au

⁴ Explainer: Uluru Statement from the Heart - Creative Spirits, retrieved from <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/selfdetermination/uluru-statement-from-the-heart>

⁵ From the Heart (website) accessed 03/08/22 at <https://fromtheheart.com.au/>

⁶ St Vincent de Paul Society (2021), *Vinnies NSW welcomes Uluru Statement from the Heart recognition*. Media release 27 May 2021

⁷ Plenary Council (2022) Fifth Plenary Council of Australia Reconciliation: *Healing Wounds, Receiving Gifts*, <https://plenary-council.catholic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/FINAL-Decree-1-Reconciliation-Healing-Wounds-Receiving-Gifts.pdf>