



Conference Reflection and Action Kit

HEARING THE CALL FOR CONSTITUTIONAL RECOGNITION

Let us consider the invitation of our First Nations brothers and sisters to walk together in ‘a movement of the Australian people for a better future’. The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* calls for *Voice, Treaty, Truth* as important steps in this movement for Constitutional recognition.

Recognition is so important for all of us. 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 who were dispossessed and dominated since the first days of British colonisation. The powerlessness of not having a voice or the right of self-determination remains as unfinished business in our shared history.

(For further information: [Social Justice Statement: Joining the Struggle for Recognition](#))



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OR PRAYER OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Acknowledgement of Country is a way of being aware and showing respect to the Traditional Custodians, the First Peoples who have lived and cared for the lands on which we meet since time immemorial.

This can be done as a stand-alone Acknowledgement or as a Prayer of Acknowledgement at the beginning of a meeting.

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Traditional Custodians of this land, with deep respect. May the elders, past and present, be blessed and honoured. May we join together and build a future based on compassion, justice, hope, faith and reconciliation.

Prayer of Acknowledgement

Holy Spirit, we invoke your blessing on this country and on us as we gather today.

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders of this place, both past, present and emerging, and the continued cultural and spiritual connection to the lands and waters.

We also acknowledge that our forbearers came into these sacred spaces, changing forever an older way of life.

Bless our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters and bless us.

Help us to join our hands and hearts together.

Help us to heal one another and the land, so that our lives may flow with harmony and that we may live with love and deep respect.

Amen.

THE ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

The Uluru Statement was made in 2017 after a long and extensive deliberation process by over 250 First Nations delegates across Australia. The Statement was the culmination of decades of work on constitutional recognition of First Nations people.

Watch and listen to the words of the Statement read by either:

First Nations leaders:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWolgPyQTK4>,
or

Professor Megan Davis:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YJrHStMY1Gg>

Or read the following text of the Statement:

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, remain 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 powerlessness*.

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.

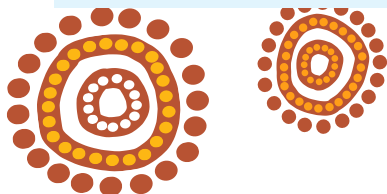
In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

Questions for Discussion

- What words or phrases did you find significant as you read the Uluru Statement? How does the call of the Statement make you feel?
- The powerlessness of not having a voice undermines human dignity. Where have you seen or encountered the suffering endured by First Nations peoples?
- The Rule talks about the importance of ensuring people can speak for themselves and for us to speak up when they have no voice. How can we spread the word about the call for a First Nation's Voice?

(Resources to assist the discussion:

[Explainer – Uluru Statement Form the Heart](#); [FAQs about the Uluru Statement and First Nations Voice](#))



SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

(Drawn from [The Uluru Statement From The Heart – Vincentian Reflection](#))

ISAIAH 40: 3-5

3 The voice of one calling out, “Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make straight in the desert a path for our God.

4 Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; And let the uneven ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley;

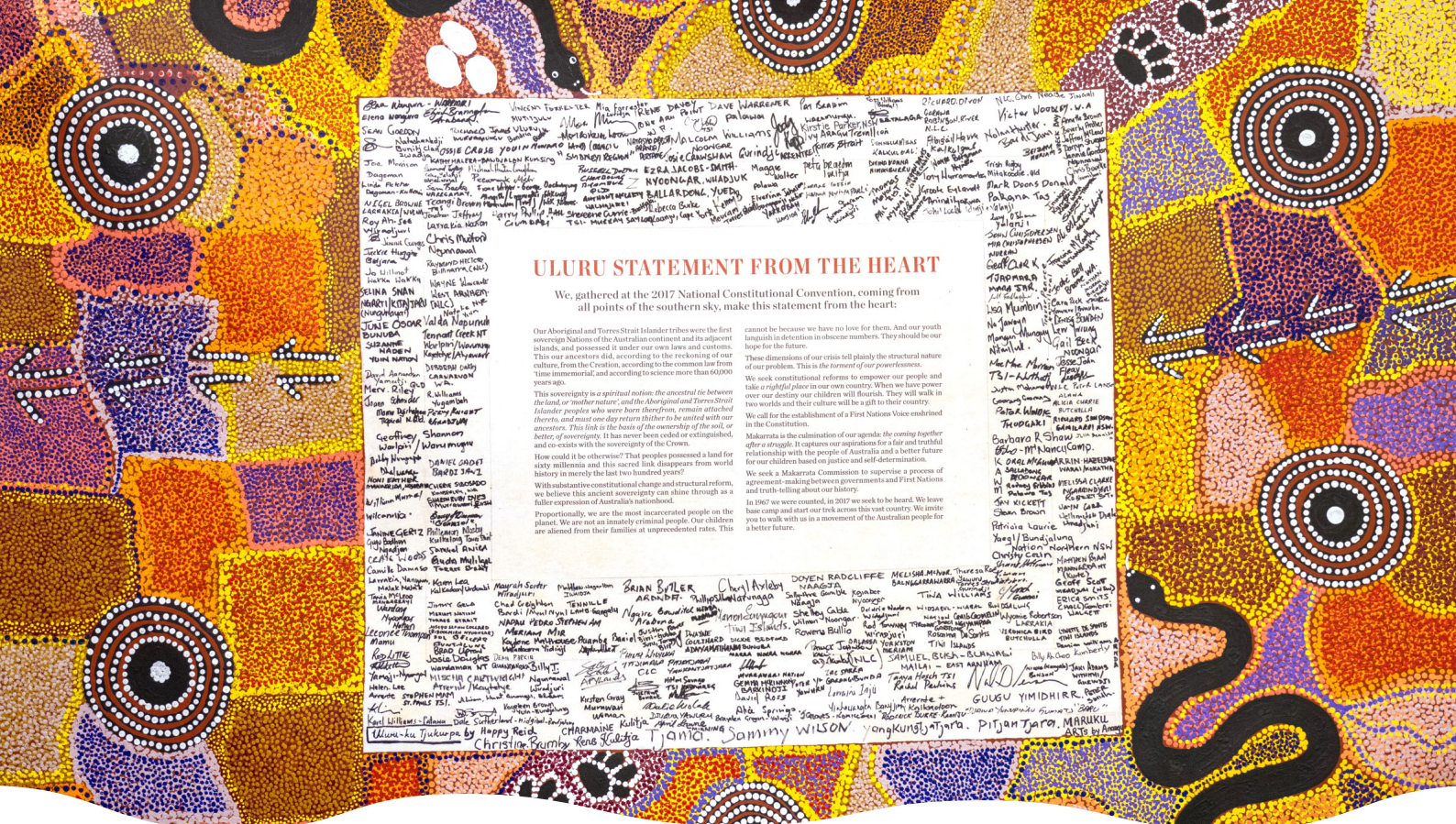
5 Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

When we think of the wilderness sometimes, we are reminded of rough terrain or barren deserts. We see the wilderness again in New Testament before Jesus is crucified, he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. This time was one of immeasurable pain for Jesus.

So, when we hear about the wilderness in this passage from Isaiah, we also hear that a voice of one cries out right here. What is the pain in this wilderness? From this place of pain, where there is isolation and harsh conditions, a voice of one cries out! We can view this as a single voice, like the voice we recall from Exodus with Moses and the burning bush, or the still small voice of God in a rushing wind. Or, we can see this as one united voice! A voice of unity from the places of pain and despair, within this wilderness comes a collective cry to make the paths straight.

We are asked in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* to walk with our First Nations peoples in unity with them for truth seeking, treaty and A VOICE. From our very own wilderness within our Nation's brutal history we are called to raise the valleys and smooth out the uneven ground and take our part in a more just and compassionate society.

This passage of scripture finishes with what we can reflect on as a commissioning from God for this most important demand. Preparing these paths, walking in unity and being a voice of one will then reveal the glory of the Lord, that the Lord has spoken. We must always look for opportunities where we can speak into the darkness of the wilderness of our days and do whatever good works are at our hands for sake of dignity, truth and restoration.



ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

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(This area contains numerous handwritten signatures in various colors, including names like Brian Byler, Cheryl Arlidge, Domen Radcliffe, and many others.)

Reflective Questions

- In what ways have you been led by the Spirit into the wilderness?
- What aspects of the wilderness can you connect to the pain our First Nations peoples have endured?
- What actions can we take as Vincentians to support the Uluru Statement's call for a First Nations Voice to Parliament?

CLOSING REMARKS

We know well the material hardship experienced by First Nations peoples. One in five people seeking the support of the Society in NSW identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Over the years, different representative bodies and processes have been established to consult First Nations Peoples – but they have been changed, diminished or taken away by successive Governments.

At a fundamental level, Constitutional recognition and a First Nation's Voice will help address entrenched disadvantage by simply ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a place at the table when legislation and policies concerning them are being developed.

As the referendum approaches, our State President Paul Burton and State Council has asked each Conference to take on three important responsibilities:

- to help ensure public debate in our local communities is open and respectful,
- to keep the dignity and wellbeing of First Nations peoples as our central focus before, during and after the referendum, and,
- to be informed about the call of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*.

(Possibly screen the *History is Calling* referendum video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gF6DqYH6FE>)

Members who are interested in learning more about the Uluru Statement and the Voice to Parliament can find important information in this [Resource List](#).



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