

Mercy Advocacy

'The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way affected, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ'

~ Art 1 Gaudiam et Spes



Seeding the Future with Others

Recognizing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the Australian Constitution - our time to address *'the great Australian silence'*

In 1986 Pope John Paul speaking in Alice Springs made us all aware of the absolute need for the inclusion of our indigenous brothers and sisters if the Church and Australia itself were to be fully what God wanted them to be. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have long struggled for recognition as the First Peoples of this land. They are calling us now to amend the federal constitution to correct their exclusion and to remove discriminatory clauses from our founding document.

The Spirit is stirring as we see auspicious signs for the building of community momentum for change. There is rare enough cross-party support; we have seen the appointment as Australian of the Year of Adam Goodes, Indigenous advocate against racism and supporter of the Recognise campaign and, as Senior Australian, Fred Chaney, former senator and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, co-founding chair of Reconciliation Australia and, over a 50-year period, committed advocate for indigenous rights. As well, support is growing for the idea of an updated Constitution that reflects the reality of Australia today. According to Newspoll, a majority of Australians support some kind of constitutional reform to recognize Indigenous Australians. But there is not yet the broad awareness needed to ensure that a referendum succeeds.



“What a great day it will be for Australia when we fix that historic exclusion together.”

ADAM GOODES, Australian of the Year



Why should the Constitution recognize the first Australians?

The Australian Constitution is the founding political and legal document of our nation. It underpins our federal laws and system of government. Written over a century ago, it was shaped by the values and beliefs of the time. Input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was not even a consideration. The Constitution does not recognize the first chapter of our national story - missing is acknowledgement of the people who have lived in this land for tens of thousands of years.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are still not recognised in our Constitution as Australia's First Peoples. Most people would be surprised and shocked to know that the Constitution also allows discrimination.



“No gesture speaks more deeply to the healing of our nation’s fabric than amending our nation’s founding charter.”

JULIA GILLARD, Former Prime Minister



What will constitutional change achieve? Is it only symbolic?

The issue concerns not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but our nation as a whole. In 2008, the Federal Parliament delivered the National Apology and on February 18 last year, the Act of Recognition. These public acknowledgements of past wrongs may seem merely symbolic but it has been humbling to witness how much they have meant to Aboriginal people. To complete the recognition of their dignity as First Peoples our constitution must be amended.



“Constitutional recognition goes beyond symbolic significance and will have practical consequences for equality. It’s a way of acknowledging and respecting Indigenous Australians’ distinct cultures, identities and custodianship of the land.”

GABI HOLLOWS, Founding Director, Fred Hollows Foundation



The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists sees constitutional recognition having a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians. For **Noel Pearson** this bears on our national well-being:



“This is much more than a question of symbolism; this is a question of national wellbeing and national identity. It’s about coming to terms with who we are as a nation and deciding who we want to be in the future”



How can we help build momentum for referendum change?

- Educate oneself by keeping an eye on developments
- Sign up as a supporter at www.recognise.org.au
- Get family and friends involved in the conversation
- Check indigenous programmes on radio/TV, ABC, SBS, NITV...





”I think we have a duty to do the right thing. So I'm encouraging you, as a person you know is pretty conservative, to move yourself to the position where we move this nation forward as one. ”

BARNABY JOYCE, Deputy Leader of the Nationals



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