



Aboriginal Recognition Act first step to Constitutional change

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) in partnership with the Uniting Church in Australia, today welcomed the announcement of an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Recognition Act as an overdue and vitally important first step forward on the path to a referendum and Constitutional reform.

National Administrator of the UAICC Rev. Shayne Blackman said that the Act laid the groundwork for Australia's foundation document to finally recognise the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"This Act will have a significant and positive impact on the way Aboriginal people see themselves and their place in the community," said Rev. Blackman.

"While the Act is symbolic, the wording of its title is extremely important. There must be 'recognition' that our culture has weathered the devastations of colonialism. 'Recognition' that only 45 years ago, Aboriginal people were not even recognised as citizens in this country. 'Recognition' that despite the ongoing impact of our painful collective history, we continue to survive.

"Many of us feel invisible on our own land. Governments make decisions for us and say they are acting in our best interest. But this Act recognises our voice, our place and our value - and that is why we support it."

President of the Uniting Church in Australia Rev. Prof. Andrew Dutney said that the Church's own journey of constitutional change had been an invaluable opportunity for growth.

"In 2009, the Uniting Church adopted a revised Preamble to our Constitution which acknowledged the fundamental relationship between Aboriginal peoples and their land, and the significant role First Peoples had played within our Church.

"The journey was not an easy one for us. It involved listening with open hearts, and the acknowledgement of painful truths, but it allowed all members of our Church to heal and to build relationships based on truth, justice and trust."

Both Rev. Blackman and Rev. Prof. Dutney encouraged the Government and Opposition to continue to work together in good faith in the move towards a referendum.

"A well-resourced education campaign will help us bring about long-overdue amendments. This change will ensure that we are able to move beyond the shame and distrust that has characterised relationships of the past," said Rev. Prof. Dutney.

"We know that the referendum has been delayed because less than 40% of non-Aboriginal people in Australia have even heard about potential Constitutional change."

Rev. Blackman said, "Despite the delay in the referendum, the Act of Recognition gives us hope that we can move the debate forward and ultimately see a more reconciled future between Aboriginal and other Australians."

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