



15 July 2018

Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

At our annual gathering of over 180 members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia just held, we agreed to write to you about our grievous disappointment at the Government's response to the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*.

Quakers are a religious community in the Christian tradition, established in England in the 17th century, who are constantly seeking that of God in everyone. From the early days of Quakerism in Australia in the 19th century therefore, we have strongly supported justice for First Nations Peoples and their descendants.

At our last annual gathering in 2017, we welcomed the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* as an opportunity for the governments and the wider community to enter into dialogue with the First Nations Peoples on a way forward.

Our 2017 statement (attached) further explains our position on the settlement of Australia, the structural and entrenched disadvantage of First Nations People since, and our hope that we, as a nation, develop and sustain recognition of First Nations People.

We were dismayed at the rejection of the Uluru statement by the Government in October 2017.

In contrast, the Australian community appears to be much more supportive of the proposals for a Voice, a Makarrata, and Truth Telling. A survey by Omnipol conducted in August 2017 showed that around 60% of the community favour adding a First Nations People's Voice to Parliament. The recent moves by the Victorian and Northern Territory Governments to negotiate treaties with First Nations Peoples are another indication of the public interest in building a better relationship among all Australians.

We have heard that Indigenous leaders have regrouped and are developing further steps to have their voice recognised at the Federal level and the Joint Committee on Constitutional Recognition has initiated its enquiry. It has already received many submissions and held public hearings which reveal the ongoing concern of many Australians that we should "come right way" in our

Australia Yearly Meeting

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relationship between First Nations People and other Australians. This Joint Committee is expected to bring an interim report in August and a final report in November,.

We strongly urge that these reports be received with openness and willingness to proceed with a formally recognised Voice, a Makarrata and Truth Telling at the Federal level.

Australian Quakers will continue to promote all moves that will lead to an effective reconciliation with First Nations People.

We look forward to receiving your response to our concern.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J.R. Jordan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jo Jordan
Presiding Clerk
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia

cc:
Nigel Scullion, Minister for Indigenous Affairs
Shayne Neumann, Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs
Richard Di Natale, Australian Greens Parliamentary Leader

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A Quaker Statement 50 years after the 1967 Referendum

We acknowledge the First Nations Peoples of Australia who have sustained this land for tens of thousands of years.

Our Quaker testimonies call us to be in right relationship with all peoples. As Quakers, we are learning how to uphold First Nations Peoples and their descendants in Australia, in our joint ongoing journey towards justice.

We long for and are working towards a reconciled Australia, believing that the coming into right relationship between First Peoples, the original custodians of the land, and other Australians is fundamental to an inclusive non-violent, Australian society.

The 1967 referendum, enabling the Australian Commonwealth Government to pass laws in relation to First Nations and to include them in the Australian census, raised hopes that have not been fulfilled. First Nations Peoples tell us that, despite some improvements, they still see themselves at the 'bottom of the pile' in health, education and wellbeing.

We are mindful that the life we enjoy today is the result of the invasion and dispossession of their land, which led to the destruction of their culture and way of life. The continuing trauma from colonization damages us all.

The European perspective shaping much of the history of Australia has prevented us from valuing and embracing the wisdom and knowledge of the world's oldest continuing cultures. We are and can all be enriched by their wisdom and knowledge.

We deplore the continuing devastation of culture, for example the overreaching of the Northern Territory Intervention, the continuing struggle of First Peoples to control their lands and resources, their over-representation in the prison system, the removing of children, substance abuse and suicide.

To create the peaceful co-existence we seek, we need to acknowledge the past in all its complexities, provide reparation for past and current injustices, and recognize the wisdom in all our cultures, perhaps through a truth and reconciliation process.

Therefore, we commit to 'Come Right Way' and 'Care Right Way' and seek in our daily lives to:

- educate ourselves about the history and present reality of the First Peoples of the lands we reside on, and uphold their right to self-determination;
- understand the issues surrounding recognition and sovereignty;
- learn from the history of the complex relationship between First Nations and other peoples, spanning massacres to cooperation;
- foster respect for sacred places and newer sites of significance e.g., Tent Embassies and city parks;
- discern the racism within ourselves, and work towards justice, peace and healing for us all.

Australia Yearly Meeting
July 2017, on Kurna country

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