

UNAA Statement on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples November 2019

The UNAA acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Lands and pay our respects to Australia's First Peoples, the world's oldest continuing culture and all of the world's Indigenous Peoples. The UNAA believes in the rights of all peoples and recognises and celebrates the continuing care for country, knowledge and connection to land, sea and community of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for over 70,000 years.

The UNAA launched its first Reconciliation Action plan in October 2019. The RAP will support the UNAA to work more closely with and provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities.

The UNAA notes:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples continue to on average, experience lower outcomes than non-Indigenous Australians in education, employment, health, justice, and community safety.
- In 2019, the Prime Minister's *Closing the Gap* progress report showed two of the seven targets were on track.¹
- While the gap in outcomes is closing in some areas, it is widening in others. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples remain on average, at increased risk of being incarcerated,² and are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse,³ unemployment,⁴ and health issues.⁵
- Racism and discrimination in society and lower outcomes education, justice, the legal system and sport impact the rights and freedoms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. This leads to decreased access to opportunities and increases the risk of poor life-long outcomes and intergenerational disadvantage.
- 143 countries voted in support of adopting the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States voted against the proposal, but Australia formally endorsed the Declaration in 2009.
- The importance of all languages and diversity, in particular with 2019 being the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages.

¹ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap Report 2019*, p. 5.

² Ibid, p.123.

³ Natalie Taylor, Julia Putt, 'Adult sexual violence in Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities in Australia' (2007), *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice no.345*, Australian Institute of Criminology, p. 3.

⁴ DPMC, *Closing the Gap Report 2019*, p.96-97.

⁵ Ibid, p. 120-123.

The UNAA urges all political parties to:

- Recognise reconciliation is one of the most pressing issues facing Australia and learn from the relative reconciliation successes of countries such as New Zealand⁶ and Canada.⁷
- Lead in the acknowledgment, respect and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their history, culture, language, care for country and achievements.
- Accept the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, leaders and communities to implement the recommendations where reasonably possible.
- Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in Parliament, including through a recognised body in line with the *Uluru Statement* recommendation for the ‘establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution’ and building from the example of Canada’s Assembly of First Nations Peoples.
- Immediately review and implement where reasonably possible, the 330 recommendations of the 1987 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.
- Increase opportunities for representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in all decision making and policy roles in the Australian Public Service, in particular in Indigenous Affairs.
- Reaffirm its support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and re-evaluate its compliance with the areas of concern identified in the 2015 report of the UNDRIP Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review.⁸

⁶ New Zealand has a treaty with the Maori people, which has enabled reconciliation by establishing the Maori council, and a treaty-inspired settlement system for British abuses. Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, ‘What can we learn from New Zealand?’ (2014), *Cape York Partnership*.

⁷ Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada includes the Canadian Government’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and information centres for various class-action lawsuits against the government for past abuses.

⁸ Reconciliation Australia, ‘The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)’ (2015), *Reconciliation Australia*, p. 2.

